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ABSTRACT

In 1991, the Minnesota Legislature enacted the first legislation in the nation to permit creation of legally and financially independent public schools called charter schools. In February 1996, the Minnesota State Board of Education authorized an 18-month evaluation of Minnesota's charter schools. An evaluation team from the University of Minnesota gathered data through a telephone survey of the 14 charter schools in operation during spring 1996; site visits; interviews; analysis of student performance data; a survey of staff, parents, and students; and a comparison of Minnesota's charter-school legislation and charter schools with those of other states. This report includes the findings available as of December 1996. The data show that starting new charter schools is very hard work. Charter schools are hampered by a lack of precedent, a lack of resources, innovation under daily pressure, the creation of school culture from scratch, difficulties in balancing planning and implementation, and environmental pressures. The report does not argue that Minnesota charter schools are failing, but that they are encountering developmental issues that locate them squarely in the experience reported in other public and private sectors. It is recommended that new charter schools: (1) confront the additional stresses that make the press of schooling even more potent in new schools; (2) pay more attention to the needs of teachers; (3) develop themselves as active learning communities yet constrain their aspirations for curriculum development; (4) plan for the socialization of members; and (5) actively engage in designing teachers' roles as well as being flexible and experimental in instruction and curriculum content. A total of 22 tables and one figure are included. (Contains 13 references.) (LMI)

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MINNESOTA CHARTER SCHOOLS EVALUATION

INTERIM REPORT
December 1996

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This report was written by Cheryl Lange, Camilla Lehr, Patricia Seppanen, and Mary Sinclair. Karen Seashore Louis contributed to the formulation of conclusions. Jim Ysseldyke consulted on the assessment of student performance and the reporting of assessment data. Lisa Ahlberg, Jo Coleman, Sara Danforth, Verna Simmons, and Sharon Sundre assisted in data collection and analysis. Joshua Davis handled the transfer of this report to the CAREI Website (http://carei.coled.umn.edu).

Geoff Maruyama served as principal investigator, providing general direction and oversight. Patricia Seppanen served as project director and Cheryl Lange coordinated the assessment of student performance. Abby Weiss, from the Institute for Responsive Education in Boston, reviewed the comparative analysis of Minnesota charter legislation for factual accuracy.

Even greater contributions were made by charter school staff, parents, and students who most graciously answered our questions, provided written documents, and allowed us to observe program operations. Sponsoring district staff members thoughtfully helped us understand their relationships with charter schools and experiences with Minnesota's charter legislation. Finally, we appreciate the cooperation and assistance provided by William Allen and other staff from the Minnesota Department of Children, Family and Learning.

The responses of charter schools and sponsoring school districts to the report will be appended in the next printing.

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Minnesota Charter Schools Evaluation Interim Report
Executive Summary

Overview

In 1991 the Minnesota Legislature enacted the first legislation in the nation to permit creation of legally and financially independent public schools called *charter schools.*[1] According that legislation, Minnesota charter schools must be designed to meet one or more of the following purposes:

- Improve pupil learning;
- Increase learning opportunities for pupils;
- Encourage use of different and innovative teaching methods;
- Require measurement of learning outcomes and create different and innovative forms of measuring outcomes;
- Establish new forms of accountability for schools; or
- Create new professional opportunities for teachers, including the opportunity to be responsible for the learning program at the school site.

In February, 1996, the Minnesota State Board of Education authorized an 18-month evaluation of Minnesota's charter schools to focus on three major policy questions:

- Are Minnesota charter schools doing what they were designed to do?
- Are the charter schools improving student achievement?
- Are the charter schools successful?

To answer these questions, an evaluation team from the University of Minnesota completed four types of data collection activities. First, the evaluation team developed a descriptive database for charter schools currently operating in Minnesota.[2] This database uses information collected during late spring, 1996, via a telephone survey with a designated contact person at each of the 16 charter schools. Second, team members completed two-day site visits to each charter school during spring and fall, 1996, to interview staff, students, parents, a knowledgeable person at the host district, and to conduct informal observations of classes or learning experiences. Third, the team worked collaboratively with educators at the

[1] Minnesota Statute 120.064.

[2] Sixteen of the 19 charter schools in current operation in Minnesota are part of this evaluation study. One charter school opened for instruction during the 1992-93 school year; five schools opened in 1993-94; seven schools opened in 1994-95; and three schools opened in 1995-96. Three schools that began offering instruction in fall, 1996, opened after data collection started and were therefore not included in this study.

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charter schools to both assemble student performance data generated by the charter schools and to collect additional survey data from staff, parents, and students during fall, 1996.[3] Finally, the team systematically compared Minnesota's charter school legislation and operating charter schools with other states in terms of growth, the role of state education agencies in relation to this growth, and key legislative provisions and policies.

This report includes findings that were available as of December, 1996. Questions regarding the performance of students, in particular, require multiple data collection episodes in order to look at change over time. The evaluation team expects to collect additional student performance data during spring, 1997, and to issue a final report in July, 1997.

Findings

General Characteristics of Minnesota Charter Schools

- Half of Minnesota charter schools (8 schools) are located in Minneapolis or St. Paul, three are located in suburban communities, and five are in small cities/towns or rural areas.

- Minnesota charter schools vary in the grade-levels served: Four schools offer grades K-5 or K-6; four offer preK-8, K-8, K-9, or 1-8; four offer 7-12 or 10-12; and four are K-10 or K-12.

- Minnesota charter schools are small, averaging 119 students with a range of 34 to 240 students per school as of fall, 1996.

- Minnesota charter schools have low student to staff ratios (averaging 12:1).

- As of spring, 1996, the enrollment of students with disabilities averaged 25 percent, students with limited English proficiency averaged 10 percent, and students eligible for free and reduced price lunch averaged 47 percent.

- Most charter schools in Minnesota (14 schools) are new schools rather than public or private schools that converted to charter school status (2 schools).

- Of the 54 percent of charter school teachers who responded to a fall, 1996, survey, 32 percent have no previous teaching experience and another 12 percent have one year previous teaching experience.

[3] The overall response rate for charter school students (grades 6-12) was 68 percent for the student survey and 60 percent for the satisfaction rating scale; the survey response rates for parents of charter school students and charter school staff were 49 percent and 54 percent, respectively.

The Mission of Minnesota Charter Schools

- The stated missions, as described by charter schools, focus on serving particular student populations; providing quality education; providing innovative learning experiences; providing community-oriented educational experiences; being a racially and culturally diverse community of students, parents, and staff; and/or respecting and appreciating the differences in people in a peaceful manner.

Charter School Boards

- All but two of 16 charter schools have established a board of directors for the school in which teachers hold majority membership. In these two schools, more corporate boards function and teachers are involved in decisionmaking as they might be in a conventional public school.

- In a small number of charter schools, board members, other staff, and parents interviewed commented that their charter board functions as designed or has evolved into a workable model. For a majority of schools however, the issue of governance is an ongoing focus of concern for staff and parents who participate on the board, for different reasons.

Facilities

- Half of the schools have acquired their facilities through a commercial leasing arrangement; four schools use public school space; and six use some "other" arrangement, including leasing space from a local township below market price, leasing from a church at near market price, using a building provided by a local government unit free of charge, or leasing from an individual private party.

- Approximately half of the charter schools are located in nontraditional educational facilities, some by choice and others because it was the most suitable space available. Nontraditional settings include: renovated commercial/industrial space, including a former racquetball center, main street businesses, or the basements of commercial offices or factories; a public recreation center; the YWCA; former office space at a publicly owned apartment tower complex; and a church. The remaining sites are located in either a former public school building (five sites) or a former parochial school building (two sites).

- Approximately 14 percent of the parent respondents and 19 percent of the student respondents (in grades 6 through 12) report they are *dissatisfied* or *unhappy* with their school building, including the maintenance of the facility. Many programs are taking advantage of community-based resources (the public library, recreational facilities, public playgrounds, neighboring school cafeterias, a YWCA) to overcome potential inadequacies.

The Role and Perspectives of Parents

- The most common approaches to parental involvement, used with a majority of parents in over half of the Minnesota charter schools, involve a written contract between the school and the home and/or the use of at-home learning activities.

- Parents report being more involved with charter schools than they were with their former schools, attending more parent meetings and participating on at least one committee, volunteering at the school on a regular basis, and/or being more involved in decision making about school policies and development.

- Decisions related to school curriculum, budgets, school policies engage parents, but only a subgroup of them. There is substantial variability between charter schools in this area.

- In terms of parent satisfaction, almost all parents (90 percent) give the charter school their son or daughter attends a grade of A or B, while only three percent give the school a D or F. In a recent nationwide survey of parents (Kappan, 1996), fewer parents gave their child's school an A or B (65 percent) while a larger percentage (11 percent) gave their child's school a D or F. Aspects of charter schools in which parents express greater dissatisfaction include: extracurricular activities, school buildings and their maintenance, the availability of technology, the availability of supplies, and school transportation.

The Role and Perspectives of Teachers

- The professional roles of teachers vary dramatically across Minnesota charter schools. Some schools have a designated principal as the authority figure for students and a faculty of teachers. Other schools have expanded or significantly modified the teacher role to include additional responsibilities.

- Staff report high levels of satisfaction with their charter school experience (81 percent satisfied/very satisfied versus six percent dissatisfied/very dissatisfied). About one out of four charter school staff members express dissatisfaction with the condition of their school building or staff compensation. Compared to teachers nationwide who have completed the same survey, charter school staff members' level of satisfaction is fairly typical for all categories surveyed.

The Role and Perspectives of Students

- Student involvement in governance is minimal in Minnesota charter schools. In a few sites, students are involved in decisionmaking regarding the school as a whole.

- Slightly less than half (42 to 47 percent) of the student respondents (in grades 6-12) who attend charter schools report they are happy or very happy with decisionmaking opportunities available to them at the charter school, the importance of meetings that students are invited to attend, how much opportunity students have to comment on courses that are offered, and how well school administrators listen to student ideas. Overall, students' satisfaction with decisionmaking falls within the average range when compared with students nationwide.

- The satisfaction level of student respondents (in grades 6-12) in most charter schools is average to above average when compared to the ratings of students across the country who completed the same survey for their schools. Only one area, the availability of student activities, falls in the below average range in four of 16 charter schools.

Partnerships with Community-based Organizations

- Minnesota charter schools vary in their relationships with other community-based organizations. At one end of the continuum, a few schools were founded as a partnership, with each organization agreeing to assume a particular role in relation to the school, including the donation of financial and inkind resources. In addition, a few schools were founded under the umbrella of an existing community-based organization that is designed to serve children and families. At the other end of the continuum, the remaining schools have relationships with community groups that are similar to conventional public schools.

- The most common type of relationship with the community, being used by approximately one-third of Minnesota charter schools, involves the use of community-based learning opportunities for students that focus on the completion of a particular learning project. In these schools, older students are required to fulfill a community-service requirement as part of their instructional program.

Relationship to Charter Sponsor

- Charter schools are primarily sponsored by local school boards; two of the 16 schools that are part of this study are sponsored by the Minnesota State Board of Education.

- Charter schools vary in their relationships to their sponsoring school boards with some sites having little or no contact with the board once the charter contract is approved. Others receive academic and administrative services from the sponsoring school district, either on an inkind or contractual basis. In 1995-1996, the most common services provided to charter schools by sponsoring school districts include transportation (used by 12 charter schools) and food services (used by three schools). Other services provided are insurance coverage,

purchasing services, and the assignment of district special education staff at the charter school site (each used by one or two charter schools).

- The degree and types of oversight being carried out by sponsoring school boards varies from conducting its own annual evaluation of the charter school to virtually no interaction for the purpose of accountability. In a majority of sites (75 percent), however, some type of oversight procedures are being implemented. Many times, the contract renewal process is used as the point in which the sponsoring school district exercises any oversight and asks the charter school to be accountable for student performance.

- While respondents from a few sites are able to articulate and substantiate the effect of charter schools on the surrounding schools/communities, most focused on identifying what they *hope* will happen. An absence of demonstrated impacts of the charter school on the surrounding schools and community may be due to the respondents' lack of knowledge of impacts within the host school district. Larger sponsoring districts, in particular, view charter schools as a vehicle for serving difficult subpopulations of students who potentially are much more expensive to serve in an alternative setting. Smaller districts particularly feel the loss of per pupil aid.

Characteristics of Enrolled Students

- Charter schools tend to enroll greater concentrations of students of color than host school districts. At the same time, schools vary dramatically in their enrollment of concentrations of white, black, or American Indian students. Half of the schools enroll fewer than 20 percent of students of color and the other half enroll over 60 percent students of color, including five schools that serve 80 percent or more students of color.

- Of the students attending Minnesota charter schools, an estimated average rate of 25 percent have a disability with an active individual education plan (IEP) (vs an average rate of 15 percent in the host districts) and 47 percent are eligible for free- or reduced-price lunch (vs an average rate of 29 percent in the host districts). Approximately 10 percent are limited English proficient (vs an average rate of 5 percent in the host districts). Individual charter schools vary widely in their enrollment of students with disabilities, limited English proficiency, or from low-income families.

- The majority of students (77 percent) in grades 6 through 12 report attending a regular public school prior to charter school enrollment; smaller percentages report attending home-school (12 percent), private school (7 percent), or alternative school/program (3 percent).

The Performance of Charter School Students

- The average *attendance* rates for charter schools during the 1994-95 school year are approximately the same as for their comparable sponsoring school districts (91 percent versus 94 percent for sponsoring school districts). This attendance level should be viewed positively since more than half of the charter schools serve students whom they define as at risk for higher school absenteeism and school noncompletion. In 15 of 16 charter schools no students were suspended for absenteeism or tardiness.

- Baseline data from 11 charter schools indicates that concentrations of students (50 percent or more students) in six charter schools score below the 50th percentile on nationally normed *achievement* tests as of spring, 1996, demonstrating the special subpopulations of students choosing to enroll in selected Minnesota charter schools. These data should be viewed as a baseline for further comparison.[4]

- Nine of the 16 charter schools in Minnesota enrolled students who were eligible to participate in the January 1996 pilot administration of the *Minnesota basic graduation tests in reading and math*; three of these schools chose to report results from this assessment. The proportion of charter school students passing the Minnesota basic graduation tests varied in comparison to their host districts; two out of three had a higher percentage of students passing these exams in reading and one out of two had a higher percentage passing in math.

- On multiple indicators, 50 percent or more of the *parent respondents report* their son or daughter has improved in the following areas since enrollment in the charter school: motivation for learning, confidence in abilities, satisfaction with his/her own learning, sense of responsibility, academic performance, satisfaction with his/her teachers, relationships with friends, and time spent studying. Only one area, time spent with family, is reported as not improving by more than half of the parent respondents of enrolled students.

- During the 1995-1996 school year, there were 86 *suspensions* for behaviors such as student violence, vandalism, student drug or alcohol abuse or insubordination from 10 of 15 charter schools (a range of 0 to 36 suspensions per school). The suspension rate for charter schools is lower than the estimated rate in K-12 public schools in Minnesota.

- On average, Minnesota charter schools are serving students who are more likely to engage in *high risk behaviors* than their peers, although there is variation from school to school. Charter school students in grades 6, 9 and 12 report they engaged in vandalism and fighting at

[4] Given the small number of schools that currently have usable pre-post data (five of the 16 schools), these findings will be reported in a July, 1997, final report when post-test data are available from all schools.

higher rates than their grade-level peers across Minnesota during the past year.[5] While charter school student respondents in grade 6 report using cigarettes, alcohol, or marijuana at the same rate as their peers across the state, student respondents in grades 9 and 12 report they engage in selected high risk behaviors at a slightly higher rate than their peers.

- There is wide variation in the number *of community projects and the level of student participation in these projects* across charter schools in Minnesota. Sixteen charter school directors/facilitators report that charter school participated in an average of six community projects during the 1995-1996 school year (the number by school ranges from 0 to 20 projects). Participation in at least one community project ranges from 30 to 100 percent of the overall student body in charter schools offering one or more of these projects during 1995-1996.

- In terms of *personal and social adjustment*, most charter school student respondents agree they are satisfied with themselves and are able to do things as well as most other people their age. The responses of charter school students are similar to their peers across the state. In addition, 51 percent of the charter school student respondents report they are more satisfied with themselves since attending the charter school, while 38 percent indicate no change in their level of satisfaction with themselves, and 10 percent indicate they are less satisfied.

- In terms of *getting along with others*, a higher percentage of charter school student respondents in grades 6 and 12, as compared to similar grade-level peers across Minnesota, report that most or all of the students are friendly at the school they now attend. Compared to the school previously attended, about half of the charter school student respondents indicate that students are friendlier at the charter school while 18 percent describe students as being less friendly.

- When asked about the *degree to which students at their school have made fun of, or threatened students of different races or backgrounds*, the responses of students in grades 6 and 9 are similar to their peers across the state. Student respondents in grade 12 are more likely than their peers to indicate that few or none of the students at their school engage in threatening behaviors. Compared to the school previously attended, 39 percent of the charter school student respondents indicate that fewer students make fun of or threaten students of different races or backgrounds while 17 percent feel that more students engage in these behaviors.

- More than half of the charter school teacher respondents indicate they are satisfied or very satisfied with the degree of *responsibility* students

[5] Since students were asked to indicate their involvement in these anti-social behaviors at least one time in the past year, their responses may reflect activities prior to their enrollment at the charter school if they are first year students.

show toward their school assignments, the extent to which students act in a self-disciplined manner, and overall student responsibility and discipline at their schools.

- Since enrolling at a charter school, 42 percent of student respondents in grades 6-12 *report spending more time* studying and doing homework, 36 percent report spending more time working for pay, and 30 percent reporting spending more time reading for pleasure. At the same time, 39 percent of these students say they spend more time hanging out and *less time* taking part in musical activities such as band or music lessons (31 percent), watching TV or videos (30 percent), playing sports on a school team (25 percent), or taking part in clubs or organizations outside of school (21 percent).

Factors Associated with Charter School Success[6]

- From the perspective of charter school teachers and parents, Minnesota charter schools expand the learning opportunities of students because they are smaller than conventional public schools, having smaller class sizes and lower student to teacher ratios. In addition, respondents affiliated with individual charter schools cite the use of particular instructional approaches or philosophies (that may vary across schools) and the development of close working relationships among staff, parents, and students.

- Additional approaches to expand learning opportunities for students vary from school to school, including the use of an extended school day, school year, or summer program; use of a four-period day, and offering different learning opportunities to facilitate student learning both in the school setting and in the community (e.g., self-directed learning, service learning); classroom structure (e.g., multi-age, multi-grade); use of community resources to support learning (e.g., reliance on use of local YWCA).

- As of spring, 1996, charter school directors/facilitators report their school uses the following methods to assess school performance:[7]
  - Standardized tests (reported by 88 percent of the schools);
  - Student portfolios (88 percent);
  - Parent satisfaction surveys (88 percent);

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[6] In this study, "success" is defined as the extent to which these schools are designed to address the six stated purposes of charter schools in Minnesota's charter legislation (M.S. 120.064, Subd. 1). As part of the final report (July 1997), pre-post student performance data will be used to begin to discern the characteristics of charter schools that are associated with enhanced student achievement.

[7] Please note that respondents were not asked to specify frequency of use, method(s) of data aggregation, or plans for reporting. During the onsite visits to each school, school staff indicated that a number of these methods are under development and have yet to be fully implemented.

- Student interviews/surveys (88 percent);
- Behavioral indicators such as attendance or expulsion (75 percent);
- Student demonstrations or presentations of work (75 percent);
- Performance-based assessment, developed locally (63 percent);
- Performance-based assessments, developed as part of a national or state effort (44 percent);
- College-bound rates (43 percent); and
- State assessment program (8 percent).

- A majority of schools, at this time, do not demonstrate the characteristics of *results-oriented* schools as specified in Minnesota charter legislation:
  - Most accountability plans, as specified in current charter school contracts, are overall statements of intent to evaluate and to be accountable for results; fewer than 50 percent of the plans could be implemented as specified without further refinement.
  - Nine charter schools (56 percent) produced an annual program evaluation report for the 1995-1996 school year (due annually by August 1) as required by the State Board of Education.[8]
  - Few charter school teachers or parents of enrolled children can describe the key indicators of school performance or "results" for which their school strives.
  - Few sponsoring school districts have established criteria by which performance information produced by the charter school is reviewed.

- In 14 schools of the 16 charter schools, teachers have taken on responsibilities associated with board membership, including budget, hiring and dismissal of teachers, and establishment of school policies. At this time, the opportunities for collegiality, personal growth, and professional collaboration among teachers in most Minnesota charter schools do not appear to be much different from conventional schools. While charter school teachers appear to have developed a strong esprit de corps where they have assumed administrative functions, there appears to be few organizational mechanisms for mutual support, peer mentoring, or ongoing dialogue aside from periodic staff meetings that focus on day-to-day decisions.

Minnesota Charter Policies as Compared to Other States'

- As of January, 1996, the proportion of charter schools to public elementary and secondary schools in Minnesota was comparable to the proportions in three of the four states with the largest concentrations of charter schools (California, Michigan, and Colorado). In a fourth state (Arizona), however, the proportion of charter schools to regular public schools was greater than the proportion in Minnesota.

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[8] A tenth charter school elected to use a report prepared for North Central accreditation as its annual report; as of 12/1/96 a copy of this report was not available at the Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning or the sponsoring school district.

- Minnesota's charter law is similar to or clearly more expansive than many other states' in the following areas:
  - Charter schools (start-ups) may be formed in Minnesota without demonstrating a specified level of support from teachers, parents, and community members;
  - Existing schools may convert and new schools may be started from scratch;
  - Charter schools have a blanket waiver from most Minnesota laws and regulations (except education laws and rules specifically provided for in the charter law, including teacher certification);
  - Charter schools have complete control over personnel decisions;
  - Charter schools are legally autonomous entities; and
  - Charter schools have fiscal autonomy.

- Comparatively the following provisions of Minnesota's law are more restrictive than a number of other states:
  - Limits on the number of charter schools permitted in Minnesota;
  - Limits on sponsorship to local school boards, public higher education institutions, or the State Board of Education (on appeal);
  - Limits on appeals to applicants in which at least two local school board members voted in favor;
  - Limits on eligible operators to one or more certified teachers;
  - Limits on funding to state per pupil aid and state/federal categorical aid; and
  - Not providing any startup funds from state sources.

Perceived Strengths and Weaknesses of Minnesota's Charter Law

- Perceived strengths of Minnesota's charter law include:
  - The opportunity to start a school and the relative ease in the application and approval process;
  - Assurance that schools are not elitist via the clarity of the law in terms of who charter schools can serve;
  - Authority that charter school boards of directors have over staff hiring and dismissal;
  - An emphasis on school performance which gives a group with an innovative idea the chance to deviate from the standard practices of the school district; and
  - Opportunities and protections afforded teachers who have the option to take a leave of absence from the school district to teach in a charter school.

- The perceived weaknesses include:
  - Lack of state funds for charter school startup;
  - Limitations placed on charter schools in raising external funds;
  - Lack of provision for charter school support, including processes to get accurate, timely, answers to questions about applicable state policies and practices;
  - Lack of access to full funding, particularly local aid, for enrolled students;

- Lack of revenue for the renovation, upkeep, and repair of school facilities;
- Limitation on the use of funds to purchase property; and
- Loss of revenue by sponsoring school districts (particularly smaller districts) that may put them in financial jeopardy.

- Features viewed as both strengths and shortcomings:
  - Limits on sponsorship to local school districts with a limited appeals process;
  - Requirement that a majority of the board must be teachers;
  - Licensure requirements for teachers working in charter schools; and
  - The degree to which the law actually "frees" charter schools from bureaucratic regulations.

Contract Development and Renewal Process[9]

- Both respondents from charter schools and from sponsoring school districts think the contract development and renewal process is working well overall. Many of the respondents, however, commented on a lack of consistency in the criteria being used by school board members as they consider charter applications. Due to this lack of consistency, some respondents would prefer all charters to be granted by the State Board of Education or an unrestricted appeals process.

Support to Charter Schools

- The most common barriers cited by Minnesota charter school directors/facilitators include the lack of funding for start-up and ongoing operations, lack of planning time, and inadequate facilities.

- Charter school directors/facilitators report receiving four types of support during the planning phase for the school: technical assistance (received by 69 percent), monetary support (received by 50 percent), inkind support (received by 50 percent), and/or staff training (received by 19 percent). This support was provided by businesses or private companies, community agencies, government agencies (including the Department of Children, Families and Learning), school districts, colleges or universities, and/or foundations.

- Charter school directors/facilitators and staff from sponsoring school districts are generally in agreement that the current support from the Department of Children, Families and Learning has been helpful and appropriate, but less than what is needed. The most common

[9] Findings are limited to the impressions of charter school/sponsoring school district respondents who have successfully completed the application or renewal process. Charter applicants whose proposals have been rejected were not queried. Similarly, a majority of the operating charter schools in Minnesota have not yet entered into negotiations regarding the renewal of their charter contract.

frustrations reported by charter school respondents are (a) the lack of concise information about which state reporting requirements apply to charter schools, and (b) getting answers to questions related to state and federal funds.

- Comparatively, the Department of Children, Families and Learning is providing less support to charter schools than some states. A designated staff person at the Department currently spends approximately 90 percent of his time on charter school issues. He is available to answer questions and upon request, provide written materials. He makes site visits, reviews charter school applications and coordinates the federal charter school program, including the application process and awarding of federal grants. Additionally, he serves as the contact person for the two charter schools that are sponsored by the State Board of Education. Other designated staff from units in the Department are available to answer questions that charter schools or sponsoring school districts may have once a school is operating, particularly in the areas of school finance, special education, and pupil transportation.

- Written resources provided by the Department focus on assisting charter school applicants and potential school district sponsors in the application and contract development process.

- In addition to the revenues afforded charter schools under M.S. 124.248, Minnesota received a Public Charter Schools grant from the U.S. Department of Education in fiscal year 1996 for $500,000, enabling Minnesota charter schools to receive grants of $9,000 to $50,000 for planning and startup, including the purchase of equipment.

Conclusions

A significant motivation for the development of charter schools in Minnesota is the belief that the creation of new schools that are (a) responsive to parents and educator's visions, and (b) freed from nonessential state laws and district regulations while being accountable for their results, will stimulate educational reform. Charter school proponents are responding, in part, to a growing belief that our public schools -- and professional educators entrapped in them -- are simply unable to organize in ways that are different and/or more effective than their current mode of operation.

Charter schools may come to serve as an important stimulus for change in Minnesota. The assumption that encouraging many charter schools to flourish as an approach to systemic public school improvement, however, may be unrealistic. Simply put: Starting new schools is very hard work. We see from the 16 operating Minnesota charter schools that lack of resources, difficulties in balancing planning and implementation, and environmental pressures are a fact of life for most new schools, and even for some "conversion" schools. This observation is not intended as a

critique of the charter school concept, nor of any individual charter school. It is intended only as an empirical reminder to policy makers and charter school advocates and critics that *experiments, by their very nature, will produce some frustrations and failures as well as some successes.*

Charter schools that are founded to offer a very different educational program fall into the category of both new *and* novel. This presents Minnesota charter schools with a number of potentially difficult problems: lack of precedent, problems of creating trust within the school, and difficulties in "selling" the charter concept to the broader community before it is fully developed. Current proposals to amend Minnesota's charter school law and administrative policies should be evaluated in terms of the degree to which they consider these problems.

Lack of Precedent: The Cost of Freedom

Charter schools demand that participants learn new roles. Position titles may be superficially similar, but the expectations of what will be done by people in the roles of student, parent, teacher, or administrator may be quite different. Minnesota teachers in new/novel schools have no "old hands" to whom they can turn with a problem, and no time-tested set of procedures to follow. Not only may roles be poorly defined, but often, due to the pressing nature of starting up, charter school teachers have little time to talk and discuss their work.

A second related problem is that inventing and learning new roles is inherently inefficient, and often fraught with conflict and difficulty. For many Minnesota charter schools the challenges have been particularly apparent in the areas of participatory governance and in the development and implementation of student evaluation and accountability systems -- areas where most schools are seeking to differentiate themselves from more conventional schools.

Innovation Under Daily Pressure

The problems identified above are exacerbated in Minnesota charter schools beyond what is experienced in many other types of start-up organizations because of the custodial functions that schools perform. Students are always there, and must be supervised under conditions that ensure reasonably effective learning and safety. Schedules rarely include significant time for development or reflection in which the whole faculty participate, largely because the pressure of "getting through the week" takes precedence.

The press of the daily schedule is reinforced in some schools by the nature of the student body. Charter schools are "schools of choice," and one might reasonably expect that this would produce a student body that is more highly motivated than in a non-choice school. However, because a number of Minnesota charter schools also advertise themselves as offering an "alternative environment," many students who apply may be viewed by their teachers or parents as intelligent, but unsuccessful in regular

classrooms. In other cases, the schools are explicitly intending to serve students who are not achieving in "regular" settings for a variety of reasons, ranging from disabilities to culturally insensitive curricula. Teachers' commitment to working hard and long hours does not assure they can simultaneously manage sometimes difficult student problems, establish innovative programs, engage in new forms of school governance, and develop results-oriented accountability systems. The relatively high proportion of inexperienced teachers who are working in Minnesota charter schools many only serve to compound these issues.

For most of Minnesota's charter schools, less than a year passed between the day the charter was granted and the day the schools doors opened to students. For those schools that were not pre-existing, the planning processes often did not include most of the teachers who have the very real responsibility for making the new schools succeed. The idealistic visions of school design teams have not always translated easily into school practice, and limited support has been available for staff to do the necessary curriculum and program development once the school opened its doors to students. Teachers report feeling as if they were scrambling, with little or no professional development, to design and build an airplane during take-off.

Creating School Culture From Scratch

A third problem for new organizations is to create an effective culture that supports getting the job done. Although in modern societies we are used to dealing with strangers on a daily basis, every new organization may face problems in developing a culture of cooperation. In addition, the lack of previous experience with others in the group often results in simple misunderstandings about who will typically do what, with whom, and when. Developing charter schools should increase the chances for developing trust among staff members and between staff and parents. If both teachers and students select a school rather than being assigned to a school, all stakeholders have more control over the task of finding an environment that reinforces rather than conflicts with personal value systems. Value congruence should, in turn, increase teacher commitment and effort. These results have occurred in a number of Minnesota charter schools that have reached the stage of stabilization. However, in others, a variety of factors associated with newness have interfered with the development of trust. The development of a value-cohesive community focused on children's needs takes time as well as commitment.

New schools are often staffed through the recruitment of an entirely new volunteer group of teachers and administrators. They begin their work with no knowledge of one another, and no history of collaboration. The same is true of the relationships between the school staff and parents: since parents have no previous experience with the school, nor anyplace to turn to establish a sense of expectations about how it will work, there is often anxiety and concern in this important set of relationships as well. Communication can be a problem simply because of lack of familiarity: even when teachers and parents are all committed to the special programs or instructional strategies of the school, they do not share a "shorthand" way of communicating problems, successes and frustrations. This probably accounts for the fact that, although teachers in Minnesota charter schools

rate their relationships with students much more highly that the "typical" school, other aspects of the school's functioning are viewed largely as "average."

Governance and Involvement: What's the Right Balance?

Many Minnesota charter schools aspire to increase the trust and cohesiveness of their schools by diminishing or eliminating the role of principal and by empowering teachers and parents to perform administrative and leadership functions. To date, this role shift has occurred easily in only a few schools. The parents of charter school students tend to rate their experiences very positively, and to attribute increased personal and academic growth to the school's efforts. They also see themselves as more involved than in their previous schools. Teachers, on the other hand, tend to view parental involvement as being similar to other schools, and to view any administrators as no better than teachers in "regular" schools. Older students, in general, tend to be either neutral or unhappy about their own opportunities to participate in building a school culture, through involvement in decisionmaking and governance, or through other student activities. Thus, although conflict and friction between different groups is apparent in only a few schools, there is little evidence that a common goal translates easily into a cohesive school culture in a short period of time.

Environmental Pressures

A final dilemma for new organizations revolves around the problem of maintaining effective relations with key external constituencies that provide resources. Charter schools face a tough job in establishing a legitimate place within the Minnesota public education system, which itself suffers from environmental pressures to conform to popular views of how "real schools" operate from the larger public and the state. Minnesota charter schools currently face three environmental pressures: (1) the need to be accountable for educational results; (2) the allocation of resources in a difficult fiscal environment; and (3) the effects of public visibility.

- The issue of educational accountability is one that even the public educational system in Minnesota has yet to resolve. For charter schools, the question becomes: How should a "results-oriented" accountability process look in a new organization? Mandating that schools develop accountability plans as part of their charter contracts does not assure that charter school communities (including students, teachers, parents) come to agreement on a set of educational results, implement procedures to measure the progress of the school in achieving these results, or make collective decisions based on the results achieved. In addition, sponsoring school boards face the challenge of establishing defensible criteria for reviewing the performance of charter schools once the initial charter contract has been signed.
- As parents and students in Minnesota exercise their choice for a particular charter school, concentrations of students or color, students with disabilities, and those at-risk for school failure are selecting schools that are not funded at the level of schools in the sponsoring

school district. At the same time, costs associated with obtaining, renovating, and maintaining adequate facilities further depletes the limited resources of charter schools. Resources in terms of staff time for ongoing program development and funds for professional development are additional needs of these new schools.

- Being designated a "charter school" puts a school "under the microscope." As such, new charter schools may find themselves always trying to look good rather than focusing on creating a school community that can openly reflect on what is working and what is not. The challenge for Minnesota charter schools is being able to engage in open dialogue and reflection when "the charter movement" is under intense public scrutiny.

Implications

Although the data suggest that life is challenging in Minnesota charter schools, we have also observed that some alternatively structured schools have stabilized into effective patterns of human relationships. Although not reported here indepth, we have observed many classrooms in Minnesota charter schools and believe they offer opportunities for exciting education. So, we do not argue that Minnesota charter schools are failing, but only that they are encountering developmental issues that locate them squarely in the experience reported in other public and private sectors.[10]
Many Minnesota charter schools are coping with the widely held assumption that planning and implementation are discrete and separable stages in the process of major change. These changes require evolutionary planning, in which action and development are deliberately intertwined over a relatively long period of time. Some clear recommendations can be drawn using evolutionary planning assumptions:

- **Charter schools must confront the additional stresses that make the press of schooling even more potent in new schools.** It is not enough to have some release time for teachers to take them out of the classroom. We would go so far as to assert that unless the designers of new schools confront the problem of time very directly, the chances are that they will face the same problems documented here.
- **Ideas for charter schools usually focus on students and/or educational philosophies. Minnesota charter schools need to pay more attention to the needs of adults in the school if teachers are to be retained and remain committed.** Even in conventionally structured schools, teacher engagement has been shown to be associated with student engagement, which is, in turn, associated with achievement. New schools may never be without crisis and

[10] And, we hasten to add, the discussion above does not bear on the question of whether children in these schools are receiving an effective and stimulating education. Given the timing of data collection, we are only able to report baseline information on the performance of students enrolled in Minnesota charter schools.

conflict, but those that pay attention to teachers' needs may minimize some of the issues that contribute to high levels of turnover and dissatisfaction.

- **New charter schools must develop themselves as active learning communities yet constrain their aspirations for curriculum development**. Many charter schools were founded with the idea that new models for curriculum are required. Devoting energy to borrowing and adapting existing curricula during the period of initial organization is important. But, equally important, as noted above, is to ensure that the period of school planning includes more attention to curriculum than occurs in many cases. Underlying this recommendation is the assumption that the new curriculum should be created, at least in part, by those who will deliver it. At the same time, teachers cannot be expected to efficiently develop curriculum at the same time they provide instruction.
- **New charter schools should plan for the socialization of members**. The teachers thrown together during the first year usually develop a sense of camaraderie that is profound. But, schools typically pay little attention as to how new recruits get to learn the culture and procedures of the school, and assume that once the location of the bathrooms and the photocopy machine are pointed out, that informal transmission of norms and procedures will be adequate.
- **Charter schools should actively engage in designing teachers' roles as well as being flexible and experimental in instruction and curriculum content**. Just as there are few operating models for the pedagogy of the future, designs for teacher roles are also both incomplete and poorly formulated. If the new experiments of today are to pay off in alternative paradigms for effective schooling, teachers should engage in action research and reflective dialogue about their own roles as well as those of students and educational processes.

Section I: Introduction

In 1991 the Minnesota Legislature enacted the first legislation in the nation to permit creation of legally and financially independent public schools called *charter schools*.[11] According to that legislation, Minnesota charter schools must be designed to meet one or more of the following purposes:

- Improve pupil learning;
- Increase learning opportunities for pupils;
- Encourage use of different and innovative teaching methods;
- Require measurement of learning outcomes and create different and innovative forms of measuring outcomes;
- Establish new forms of accountability for schools; or
- Create new professional opportunities for teachers, including the opportunity to be responsible for the learning program at the school site.

In Minnesota, each charter school is organized and operated either as a cooperative or a non-profit organization. A charter school may be sponsored by a school district or the Minnesota State Board of Education. Legislation in 1995 also allows up to three charter schools to be sponsored by a public, postsecondary institution; at present no charter schools are sponsored in this manner.

Sixteen of the 19 charter schools in current operation in Minnesota are part of this evaluation study (see Appendix A for brief descriptive profiles of each of the 16 schools). One charter school opened for instruction during the 1992-93 school year; five schools opened in 1993-94; seven schools opened in 1994-95; and three schools opened in 1995-96.[12] Three schools that began offering instruction in fall, 1996, opened after data collection started; they were therefore not included in this study.

In February, 1996, the Minnesota State Board of Education authorized an 18-month evaluation of Minnesota's charter schools to focus on three major policy questions:

- Are Minnesota charter schools doing what they were designed to do?
- Are the charter schools successful?
- Are the charter schools improving student achievement?

To begin to address these major questions, we completed four types of data collection activities. First, we developed a descriptive database for all Minnesota charter schools. This database uses information collected during late spring, 1996, via a telephone survey with a designated contact person at

[11] Minnesota Statute 120.064.

[12] One additional school that opened in spring, 1995, has since closed and is not part of this evaluation study.

each charter school. Second, we completed two-day site visits to each charter school during spring or fall, 1996, to interview staff, students, parents, a knowledgeable person at the host district, and to conduct informal observations of classes or learning experiences. Third, we worked collaboratively with educators at the charter schools to both assemble student performance data generated by the charter schools and to collect additional performance data from staff, parents, and students during fall, 1996. Finally, we systematically compared Minnesota's charter school legislation and operating charter schools with other states' in terms of growth, the role of state education agencies in relation to this growth, and key legislative provisions and policies.

Appendix B includes a full listing of the overall questions that guided this evaluation, the schedule of data collection, an overview of the student performance data assembled and collected as part of this study, and the number and percentage of respondents by school.

This interim report includes findings available as of December, 1996. Questions regarding improvement or growth require multiple data collection episodes in order to look at change over time. We expect to collect additional student performance data during spring, 1997, and to issue a final report in July, 1997.

The remainder of this report is organized by major topics raised by guiding evaluation questions:

- Section II presents an overview of the characteristics of 16 charter schools that are part of this study;
- Section III examines the roles parents, staff, students, and communities play in charter school operations;
- Section IV examines the relationship of charter schools to their sponsors;
- Section V analyzes the characteristics of enrolled students and their performance as of fall, 1996;
- Section VI examines the factors associated with charter school success;
- Section VII presents an analysis of Minnesota's charter legislation; it includes analyses of key legislative provisions, and charter school growth as compared to other states with charter legislation; and
- Section VIII integrates the findings outlined in previous sections to reach conclusions regarding the three overall policy questions.

Section II: Characteristics of Minnesota Charter Schools

Charter schools have operated in Minnesota for less than four years, a short time considering the complexity of designing, opening, and operating a public school.[13] This section presents an overview of the characteristics of Minnesota charter schools, focusing on the following guiding evaluation questions:

- How do charter schools describe their mission - is it related to improved student achievement?
- Is the results-oriented characteristic of charter schools being successfully implemented? What evaluation and assessment tools do charter schools use to determine their effectiveness?
- Are charter school boards operating effectively?
- What kinds of facilities are charter schools using?
- What start-up problems are charter schools encountering?

General characteristics of the 16 charter schools include:

- **Location.** A majority of Minnesota charter schools are in urban areas: eight are located in Minneapolis or St. Paul, three are located in suburban communities, and five are in small towns or rural areas.

- **Grade-levels.** Minnesota charter schools vary in the grade-levels served: four school offer grades K-5 or K-6; four schools offer preK-8, K-8, K-9, or 1-8; four schools offer 7-12 or 10-12; and four schools are K-10 or K-12.

- **Size.** Minnesota charter schools are small. During the spring of 1996, school enrollment averaged 96 students with a range of 24 to 176 students per school; as of fall, 1996, the school enrollment averaged 119 students with a range of 34 to 240 students per school.

- **Ratios of total school staff to students.** Minnesota charter schools have low student to staff ratios. The ratio of students to instructional staff is on average 12:1 as of spring, 1996.

- **Special populations served.** Minnesota charter schools serve concentrations of students with special needs. As of spring, 1996, charter school enrollment averaged 25 percent students with disabilities

[13] Fourteen of the 16 charter schools are new, start-up schools; one school had been in operation as a private, non-sectarian, school and another operated as a public alternative school.

(ranging between 0 and 100 percent), 10 percent of students with limited English proficiency (ranging between 0 and 100 percent), and 47 percent of students eligible for free and reduced lunch (ranging between 0 and 95 percent).

- **Status.** Most charter schools in Minnesota are new schools (14 schools) rather than public or private schools that converted to charter school status (2 schools).

- **Staff experience**. Of the 54 percent of charter school teachers who responded to a fall, 1996, survey, 32 percent have no previous teaching experience and another 12 percent have one year prior teaching experience.

The Mission of Charter Schools

We found that the stated missions of charter schools focus on (see Appendix A for each charter school's mission statement):

- Serving particular student populations;
- Providing quality education;
- Providing innovative learning experiences;
- Providing community-oriented educational experiences;
- Being a racially and culturally diverse community of students, parents, and staff; and/or
- Respecting and appreciating the differences in people in a peaceful manner.

A number of charter school mission statements have incorporated the mission of public education in Minnesota: ". . . a system for lifelong learning, to ensure individual academic achievement, an informed citizenry, and a highly productive workforce" (M.S. 120.0111). Other charter schools incorporate language from recent legislation related to high school graduation standards (M.S. 121.11) that articulates a goal of preparing students to function effectively as:

- Purposeful thinkers;
- Effective communicators;
- Self-directed learners;
- Productive group participants; and
- Responsible citizens.

While the mission statements of Minnesota charter schools are more global, the reasons why a charter school was founded more specifically illuminate strategies designed to improve student achievement. The study's telephone interviewers asked charter school directors/facilitators to tell us the *most important reasons* for founding the charter school. The reasons generally overlapped, falling into seven categories:

- More effectively serve a special population of students (cited by eight schools);
- Advance a particular educational vision (cited by four schools);
- Engender parent involvement and ownership (cited by four schools);
- Provide more choices for students (cited by two schools);
- Create a special learning environment that is supportive, caring, smaller, and/or structured (cited by two schools);
- More autonomy over organizational, personnel, or governance matters (cited by two schools); and/or
- Financial reasons (cited by one school).

Implementation of a Results-Orientation

Two legislative purposes for authorizing the creation of charter schools in Minnesota focus on promoting new forms of accountability for student performance:

- The measurement of learning outcomes and creation of different and innovative forms of measuring outcomes, or
- The establishment of new forms of accountability for schools.

Minnesota charter legislation further states that

> *A charter school must design its programs to at least meet the outcomes adopted by the State Board of Education. In the absence of state board requirements, the school must meet the outcomes contained in the contract with the sponsor. The achievement levels of the outcomes contained in the contract may exceed the achievement levels of any outcomes adopted by the state board.*

In addition, the legislation states that as part of the charter contract, each school must stipulate the specific outcomes students are to achieve, and, student assessment methods used to determine whether the school's contract is renewed or terminated.[14]

Finally, the legislation specifies that at least annually, charter schools must report sponsor- or state-required information. In 1995, the State Board of Education adopted an annual program evaluation and reporting system for charter schools which requires all curricular and instructional areas to be evaluated and reported on a regular, rotating basis not to exceed six years. For each curricular or instructional area, the report must include: (1) specification of selected key outcomes that are measurable and realistic; (2) identification of indicators for selected key outcomes as the standard for determining the degree to which each outcome has been attained; (3) a plan for program improvement; and (4) a survey of parents and/or students to

[14] Other grounds for renewal or termination of the charter contract include failure to meet generally accepted standards of fiscal management, for violations of law, or other good cause shown (Minnesota Statute 120.064, Subd. 21).

determine their attitudes and needs relative to the charter school and its programs, at least once every third year.

A Results-Orientation

The above legislative and policy requirements may be used as benchmarks to determine the degree to which Minnesota charter schools are implementing educational accountability systems that are results-oriented. From a review of key documents and interviews with charter school staff, parents, and sponsoring district personnel, we find that:

- Most accountability plans, as specified in current charter school contracts, are overall statements of intent to evaluate and to be accountable for results; fewer than 50 percent of the plans could be implemented as specified without further refinement (a summary of each school's accountability plan is included in Appendix A);

- Six charter schools (38 percent) have engaged in a systematic process of selecting indicators related to the performance of their school, measurement procedures, and a plan for disseminating and discussing results; of these six, four worked with the same sponsoring school district to complete this process.

- Nine charter schools (56 percent) produced an annual program evaluation report for the 1995-1996 school year (due annually by August 1) as required by the State Board of Education;[15]

- Few charter school teachers can describe the key indicators of school performance (including either indicators of student performance or opportunities to learn) for which they are accountable or how performance information is being used for overall school improvement;

- Few parents of charter school students can articulate the "results" for which their school strives or are aware of the annual evaluation report produced by the school;

- Few sponsoring school districts have established criteria by which performance information produced by the charter school is reviewed.

Evaluation and Assessment Tools

As of spring, 1996, charter school directors/facilitators report their school uses the following methods to assess school performance:[16]

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[15] A tenth charter school elected to use a report prepared for North Central accreditation as its annual report; as of 12/1/96 a copy of this report was not available at the Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning or the sponsoring school district.

[16] Please note that respondents were not asked to specify frequency of use, method(s) of data aggregation, or plans for reporting. During the onsite visits to each school, we

- Standardized tests (used by 88 percent of the schools);
- Student portfolios (88 percent);
- Parent satisfaction surveys (88 percent);
- Student interviews/surveys (88 percent);
- Behavioral indicators such as attendance or expulsion (75 percent);
- Student demonstrations or presentations of work (75 percent);
- Performance-based assessment, developed locally (63 percent);
- Performance-based assessment, developed by national or state effort (44 percent);
- College-bound rate (43 percent);
- State assessment program (8 percent).

Charter School Boards

Minnesota charter school legislation states that the board of directors shall decide matters related to school operations, including budgeting, curriculum and operating procedures. The legislation also specifies that licensed teachers employed at the school, including teachers providing instruction under a contract with a cooperative, must be a majority of the members of this board. The operators authorized to organize and operate a school must hold an election for members of the school's board of directors in a timely manner after the school begins operation. Election participants may include any staff members employed at the school, including teachers providing instruction under a contract with a cooperative, and all parents of enrolled children.

All but two of the 16 charter schools have established a board of directors for the school in which teachers hold majority membership. In these two schools, a more corporate board functions and teachers are involved in decisionmaking as they might be in a conventional public school.

In a small number of charter schools, board members, other staff, and parents interviewed commented that their charter board functions as designed or that it has evolved into a workable model. While problems are not always easy to resolve, board members at these charter schools have a clear sense of their role in policy making. Typically, separate working committees, consisting of staff or staff and parents, have been established for areas such as finance, facilities, and curriculum. There is a clear understanding of the issues that should be considered by the board and those that may be resolved by a working committee or at a staff meeting. These boards have confronted, weathered, and resolved tough issues, including staff terminations, student dismissal, financial shortfall, or funding irregularities.

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learned that a number of these methods are under development and have yet to be fully implemented.

For a majority of schools, however, the issue of governance is an ongoing focus of concern for staff and parents who participate on the board, for different reasons. According to many teachers:

- They currently spend an inordinate amount of time participating in board and committee meetings;
- Parents are either not "pulling their weight" or are overly involved in day-to-day instructional decisions about the school;
- It is difficult to divide time between program/curriculum development and classroom teaching, and at the same time, be involved in major decisions about the school;
- They are uncomfortable dealing with budget issues, particularly as it relates to setting teacher salaries.

Parents who are involved on the board (particularly those who are not also employees at the school) comment:

- They value "having a say" but note they have had to learn a lot about running a school, many times without the benefit of any training or support;
- They find that board and committee meetings time consuming, coming on top of their regular jobs and family responsibilities;
- In isolated cases, some parents feel it is appropriate for them to be involved with "day-to-day" decisions, a view that may be at odds with the school staff.

Facilities

Legally, a charter school may lease space from a board eligible to be a sponsor or a public or private nonprofit nonsectarian organization. If a charter school is unable to lease appropriate space in this manner, it may lease space from another nonsectarian organization if the Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning, in consultation with the Department of Finance, approves the lease. If that option is not viable, space may be leased from a sectarian organization if the leased space is constructed as a school facility and the Department of Children, Families and Learning approves the lease.

Eight schools have acquired their facilities through a commercial leasing arrangement and four schools use public school space (refer to Table 2.1). "Other" arrangements noted by six of the charter schools include leasing space from a local township below market price, leasing from a church at near market price, using a building provided by a local government unit free of charge, or leasing from an individual private party.

Table 2.1: Strategies Used to Acquire Facilities, Spring 1996

	Charter Schools	
	%	Freq.
• Lease from a commercial source	50	8
• Use a district facility free or at a nominal cost	19	3
• Lease at, or near, market price from the district	6	1
• Other arrangements	38	6

Note: Schools could select multiple response options, thus total N can be ≥16.
Source: Phone Survey, Minnesota Charter Schools Evaluation, 1996 (n = 16 schools).

Approximately half of the charter schools are located in nontraditional educational facilities, some by choice and others because it was the most suitable or least expensive space available. Nontraditional settings include: renovated commercial/industrial space, including a former racquetball center, main street businesses, or the basements of commercial offices or factories; a public recreation center; the YWCA; former office space at a publicly owned apartment tower complex; and a church. Charter schools are also located in former public school buildings (five sites, one of which also uses a space in a newly constructed school building) and former parochial school buildings (two sites). Regardless of the setting, the volunteer labor of parents and staff is very evident in the renovation or adaptation of these facilities.

When asked about their satisfaction with school facilities, a majority (50 percent or more) of staff, parents, and students report they are *satisfied*. Many programs are taking advantage of community-based resources (the public library, recreational facilities, public playgrounds, neighboring school cafeterias, a YWCA) to overcome potential inadequacies.

Twenty-five percent of staff, 14 percent of parents, and 19 percent of students (in grades 6 through 12), however, report they are *dissatisfied* or *unhappy* with their school building, including the maintenance of the facility. While not specifically related to the performance of students, respondents (students, parents, or teachers) in approximately one-third of the sites did identify one or more physical inadequacies in their facilities:

- Lack of dedicated bathroom facilities (currently share facilities with a restaurant);
- Lack of an onsite library or onsite lunch facilities;
- Lack of a "real gym" or onsite playground;

- Space was designed for other purposes and is not really suitable for teaching and learning, primarily due to the small size of the rooms, lack of proximity to each other, or physical layout;

- The restrictive feeling of being in basement rooms all day;

- Limitations of the facility in meeting the needs of the special population being served (poor lighting, poor ventilation, lack of elevator access to the upper floors); or

- The generally poor condition of the building (the age of the boiler and maintenance required, the need for exterior paint, the lack of attention to the upkeep of the exterior grounds, the need to install a sprinkler system) and the need to complete extensive renovations.

Problems with Starting a Charter School in Minnesota

The spring, 1996, telephone survey asked charter school directors/facilitators to rate the difficulty (on a scale from 1 to 5, with 5 being very difficult) of overcoming 16 barriers that previous studies of charter schools in Minnesota and across the United States have identified as start-up problems.[17] Table 2.2 rank-orders barriers, from the highest to lowest percentage of schools reporting difficulty caused by each barrier. The barriers rated as *somewhat difficult* to *very difficult* for most schools focus on lack of funding for start-up and ongoing operations, planning time, and facilities.

[17] See for example *Making charter schools work* by Berman, Diamond, and Premack (1995); *Charter schools . . . What are they up to?* by Education Commission of the States and Center for School Change (1995); *Minnesota charter schools: A research report* by Urahn and Stewart (1994).

Table 2.2: Barriers to Implementation, Spring 1996

	Percent of Schools Reporting by Degree of Difficulty		
	not at all to not very	mildly	somewhat to very
• Lack of start-up funds	13	6	81
• Inadequate finances for ongoing operations	6	25	69
• Lack of planning time	19	31	50
• Inadequate facilities	44	6	50
• District central office resistance or regulations	50	19	31
• State or local school board opposition	63	12	25
• State department of education resistance or regulations	63	12	25
• Internal processes or conflicts in school	50	25	25
• Health and safety regulations	69	12	19
• Federal regulations	75	6	19
• Hiring staff	50	38	12
• Union or bargaining unit opposition	69	19	12
• Community opposition	88	6	6
• Teacher certification requirements	63	31	6
• Collective bargaining agreements	94	6	0
• Accountability requirements	75	25	0

Source: Phone Survey, Minnesota Charter Schools Evaluation, 1996 (n = 16 schools).

The next section examines the roles that parents, staff, students, and communities play in Minnesota charter school operations.

Section III: Roles of Parents, Teachers, Students, and the Community

Minnesota charter legislation gives charter schools the freedom to set their governance system and working conditions. The only legislative stipulations are that teachers must have majority membership on the board of directors, and that any employed staff members and parents of enrolled children may participate in the election of these board members.

As part of the charter contract, a school and its sponsor agree on the overall plan for school management and administration. This agreement helps to define the roles played by staff, parents, students, and the community, as well as the more informal day-to-day relationships that develop.

This section provides a detailed analysis of these roles and the overall satisfaction expressed by teachers who work in these schools. Specifically, we focused our data collection on the following questions:

- What role do parents play in charter schools?
- How do charter school teachers view their roles as teachers, administrators, board members etc.? What is the level of teacher satisfaction in charter schools?
- To what degree are students utilized in the governance structure of charter schools?
- To what degree have charter schools utilized partnerships with business, community agencies etc.?

The Role of Parents in Charter Schools

Charter School Approaches to Parental Involvement

Almost all Minnesota charter schools may be described as differing in some aspects from conventional schools in their approaches to parent involvement or home-school relations. While parents were characterized as the active driving force in the establishment of three sites, in a number of the schools a core group of parents is heavily involved in ongoing development, governance, and operations. Key aspects in which these charter schools differ from more conventional schools include:

- Offering parents opportunities to have active roles in school committees and governing boards;
- Encouraging contact with teachers by providing telephones in every classroom, giving parents teachers' home telephone numbers to make communication more convenient for working parents, scheduling frequent conferences, or regularly distributing newsletters;
- Offering opportunities for parents to volunteer at school (for both classroom and administrative activities) and relying on this involvement to support the school in terms of facility renovation;

- Offering workshops, support groups, and referrals to other agencies for services;
- Using a home/school liaison who is fluent in the home language of the family.

A small number of the charter schools visited may be characterized as relying only on conventional approaches to parent involvement or home-school relations. In these schools, a few parents may serve on the school board of directors, but any well-developed plan for parent involvement is currently lacking at these schools. Parent involvement activities in these schools consist of occasional home-school communication via newsletters or parent-teacher conferences and limited parent assistance in the school or with special events.

Degree to Which Parents Are Involved in School-Initiated Activities

Individual surveys of charter school directors/facilitators and parents allowed us to examine the proportion of parents involved in particular school-sponsored activities. Involvement included: the extent of parent involvement in the overall governance and operation of the charter school, and the degree to which parents are actively involved with the school to promote the success of their own children.

Charter school directors and site facilitators estimated the extent to which parents are involved in decisionmaking processes of their charter school. As shown in Table 3.1, charter school directors/facilitators report:

- At more than half of the schools, one to 25 percent of parents are involved in decisionmaking regarding curriculum, budget, and school policies;
- At three schools, 50 percent or more of the parents are involved in decisionmaking about curriculum; one school reported this level of involvement in decisionmaking about policy; and no schools at this level regarding budget.
- Only one or two charter schools report no parental involvement in decisions related to curriculum, budget, and/or school policies.

Table 3.1: Minnesota Charter School Directors/Facilitators Report of Parent Participation in Governance Activities, Fall 1996

Decision Making in Following Areas:	Number of Schools Reporting Levels of Parent Involvement					
	0%	1-25%	26-50%	51-75%	76-100%	Did Not Report
• Curriculum	2	8	1	1	2	2
• Budget	2	10	2	0	0	2
• School Policy	1	11	2	0	1	1

Source: Site Questionnaire, Minnesota Charter Schools Evaluation, 1996 (n = 16 schools)

Parents report being more involved with charter schools than they were with their former schools (refer to Table 3.2). Specifically, parents report:

- Attending more parent meetings and participating on at least one committee;
- Volunteering at the school on a regular basis;
- Being more involved in decision making about school policies and development.

Table 3.2: Parent Respondents Reporting Participation in Governance and Volunteer Activities at Former Schools and Charter Schools, Fall 1996

Activity	Percent Reporting Participation in the Activity	
	Former School	Charter School
• Attended all or almost all parent meetings	25	51
• Volunteered at school at least once a month	25	47
• Involved in at least one district/school committee	13	38
• Involved in decision making about school policies and development	9	39

Note: Does not include respondents whose children have only attended a charter school.
Source: Parent Survey, Minnesota Charter Schools Evaluation, 1996 (n = range between 479 and 535, depending upon the activity)

We also asked charter school directors or site facilitators to estimate the extent to which parents are involved in a number of school sponsored activities to promote the success of individual students (refer to Table 3.3).

Overall, charter school directors/facilitators indicate that:

- The most common approaches, used with a majority of parents in over half of the charter schools, involve a written contract between the school and the home and/or the use of at-home learning activities;
- Other ways of involving parents used by a majority of charter schools include participation in volunteer activities, community-school projects, educational workshops and presentations, or as paid classroom aides.

Table 3.3: Minnesota Charter School Directors/Facilitators Report of Parent Participation in School Sponsored Activities, Fall 1996

School Sponsored Activities	Range of Participation by School			
	0%	1-50%	51-100%	Did Not Report
• At-Home Learning Activities	1	5	8	2
• Written Contract Between School and Home	4	2	8	2
• Volunteer School Activities	1	10	4	1
• Community-School Projects	1	10	3	2
• Educational Workshops or Presentations	0	11	2	3
• Drop-In Center or Parent Lounge	5	5	1	5
• Participation as Paid Classroom Aide	6	8	0	2

Note: A small number of directors/facilitators report that some activities do not apply to their school. These responses are included under the "did not report" column.
Source: Site Questionnaire, Minnesota Charter Schools Evaluation, 1996. (n = 16 schools)

The Role of Teachers

The professional roles of teachers vary dramatically across Minnesota charter schools. Some schools have a designated principal as the authority figure for students and a faculty of teachers. Other schools have expanded or significantly modified the teacher role to include additional responsibilities. In terms of governance, two of the 16 schools still rely on "corporate boards" and have yet to establish majority teacher boards as required by Minnesota legislation. At the other 14 schools, teachers have taken on responsibilities associated with board membership, including budget, hiring and dismissal of teachers, and establishment of school policies.

In a majority of charter schools, the day-to-day roles of teachers differ in some aspects from the conventional teacher role. For example, in some charter schools:

- Teachers must be Montessori trained in addition to having Minnesota teacher licensure;
- Teachers are involved in cross-grade team teaching or teach in multi-age classrooms;
- Teachers have decisionmaking authority over a set amount of funds from the budget to purchase classroom supplies;
- Teachers participate in the annual evaluation and reporting of student performance.

In five schools, the day-to-day roles of teachers *differ fundamentally* from more conventional public schools. In these schools, in addition to membership on the board, the teacher role has been expanded to include the roles of *mentor*, counselor, and friend to students; coordinators of instruction and students' assignments around established themes; advisors who assist students in developing their own learning plans, carrying out these plans, and reviewing student work; and developers of curriculum and school procedures (i.e., the student report card). Teachers also share many administrative functions, limiting the role of a designated administrator or facilitator to coordination with the sponsoring school district and the Department of Children, Families and Learning.

At this time, the opportunities for collegiality, personal growth, and professional collaboration among teachers in most charter schools do not appear to be much different from conventional schools (aside from added responsibilities for administrative decisions and tasks). Charter school teachers have generally been operating in a "start-up mode," and report having access to one-shot workshops during the school year and summer institutes as the primary vehicles for professional growth. Where the school adheres to a particular approach (e.g., Montessori or the Right to Read curriculum), teachers are engaged in training activities that are specific to these approaches. While charter school teachers appear to have developed a strong esprit de corps where they have assumed administrative functions, there appear to be few organizational mechanisms for mutual support, peer mentoring, or ongoing dialogue outside from periodic staff meetings that focus on day-to-day decisions.

Overall Teacher Satisfaction

When we asked staff about their overall level of satisfaction with the charter school experience, their responses were:

- Eighty-one percent *satisfied or very satisfied*;
- Thirteen percent *neither dissatisfied nor satisfied*; and
- Six percent *dissatisfied or very dissatisfied*.

As shown in Table 3.4, staff members' satisfaction was highest (75 percent or more) for two programmatic and operational aspects of their school: their co-workers and curriculum- and job-related tasks.

About one out of four charter school staff members express *dissatisfaction* with the following aspects of their school:

- The condition of the school buildings, availability of supplies and building maintenance;
- Staff compensation.

Table 3.4: School Staff Satisfaction With Minnesota Charter Schools, Fall 1996

Categories Surveyed	Percent School Staff Reporting by Degree of Satisfaction		
	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither
• Co-Workers	84	3	13
• Curriculum and Job Tasks	77	10	13
• Communication	64	19	16
• Administration	78	9	13
• Parents and Community	59	16	25
• Student Responsibility and Discipline	58	19	23
• School Buildings, Supplies and Maintenance	53	25	22
• Compensation	40	27	33
• Opportunities For Advancement	36	20	44

Note: Since Minnesota charter schools vary in their approaches to administration, responses may reflect satisfaction with the administrative structure and/or the implementation of administrative functions.
Source: Comprehensive Assessment of School Environments, Teacher Satisfaction Survey, Minnesota Charter Schools Evaluation, 1996 (n = 106 to 139 per item).

Compared to teachers nationwide who have completed the same survey, charter school staff members' level of satisfaction is about the same for all categories surveyed. Looking at average staff ratings by charter school, we find that staff report being more satisfied with at least one aspect of their current school experience than teachers in a national comparison group (refer to Table 3.5). For example, in four Minnesota charter schools, staff report greater satisfaction with opportunities for advancement than do teachers nationally.

Table 3.5: School Staff Satisfaction In Minnesota Charter Schools as Compared to a National Group of Teachers, Fall 1996

Subscales	Number of Schools With Standard Scores Falling Within Above Average, Average, and Below Average Ranges		
	Above Average	Average	Below Average
• Opportunities For Advancement	4	11	0
• Compensation	3	12	0
• Parents and Community	3	12	0
• Student Responsibility and Discipline	2	13	0
• Co-Workers	2	12	1
• Administration	2	12	1
• Curriculum and Job Tasks	1	14	0
• Communication	1	11	3
• Building Supplies and Maintenance	1	9	5

Note: Standard scores are T-scores (M = 50, SD = 10). T-scores between 40 and 59 are interpreted as average, T-scores ≥60 are interpreted as above average, T-scores <40 are interpreted as falling within the below average range. Since Minnesota charter schools vary in their approaches to administration, responses may reflect satisfaction with the administrative structure and/or the implementation of administrative functions.
Source: Comprehensive Assessment of School Environments, Teacher Satisfaction Survey, Minnesota Charter School Evaluation, 1996 (n = 15 schools).

Teacher Ratings of School Climate in Charter Schools

School climate includes a number of areas associated with the adequacy of the school program from the point of view of teachers, including teacher-student relationships, security and maintenance, and student behavioral values. In Table 3.6 we see that the ratings by charter school staff, as compared to a national group of teachers who completed the same survey, place Minnesota charter schools as *average* or *above average* in most areas. Consistent with other findings presented in this report:

- Slightly more than seventy-five percent of charter schools fell within the average range in terms of teacher-student relationships (for example, treating each student as an individual, willing to help students, patient when a student has trouble learning, understanding and meeting the needs of each student);

- Slightly more than twenty-five percent of charter schools (4 schools) fall in the below-average range in terms of student activities (for example, able to take part in school activities in which students are interested).

Table 3.6: Ratings of School Climate By Minnesota Charter School Staff, Fall 1996

Subscales	Number of Schools With Standard Scores Falling Within Below Average, Average, and Above Average Ranges		
	Above Average	Average	Below Average
• Teacher-Student Relationships	12	3	0
• Administration	7	8	0
• Student Academic Orientation	5	10	0
• Guidance	3	12	0
• Student-Peer Relationships	3	12	0
• Security and Maintenance	3	11	1
• Parent and Community-School Relationships	2	13	0
• Student Behavioral Values	2	12	1
• Instructional Management	1	11	3
• Student Activities	0	11	4

Note: Standard scores are T-scores (M = 50, SD = 10). T-scores between 40 and 59 are interpreted as average, T-scores ≥60 are interpreted as above average, T-scores <40 are interpreted as falling within the below average range.
Source: Comprehensive Assessment of School Environments, Teacher Satisfaction Survey, Minnesota Charter Schools Evaluation, 1996 (n = 15 schools).

The Role of Students in School Governance

Student involvement in governance is minimal in Minnesota charter schools. In a few sites, students are involved in decisionmaking regarding the school as a whole in the following ways:

- Participation with other members of the school community in visioning exercises regarding school direction;
- Membership on a student committee formed to address the needs of the school and other students (e.g., advising on curriculum and assisting in planning events);
- Being part of a Speakers Bureau or providing peer support to other students;
- Membership on a student council.

Students in grades 6 through 12 were asked about their satisfaction with decisionmaking opportunities available to them at the charter school. They indicate that:

- Forty-seven percent report being *happy* or *very happy* with the importance of meetings that students are invited to attend, with 21 percent *unhappy* or *very unhappy*, and the remaining neutral (neither happy nor unhappy) (n = 323);

- Forty-two percent report being *happy* or *very happy* with how much opportunity students have to comment on courses that are offered, with 33 percent *unhappy* or *very unhappy*, and the remaining neutral (n = 332);

- Forty-five percent report being *happy* or *very happy* with how well school administrators listen to student ideas, with 31 percent *unhappy* or *very unhappy*, and the remaining neutral (n = 341);

- Forty-five percent report being *happy* or *very happy* with the opportunity (in general) to help make decisions at school, with 29 percent *unhappy* or *very unhappy*, and the remaining neutral (n = 348).

(Note: n = total number of respondents per item)

Overall, students' satisfaction with decisionmaking falls within the average range when compared with students nationwide.

Partnerships with Community-based Organizations

Minnesota charter schools vary in their relationships with other community-based organizations. At one end of the continuum, a few schools were founded as a partnership, with each organization agreeing to assume a particular role in relation to the school, including the donation of financial and inkind resources. For example, partnering organizations include the Teamsters Union, the Minnesota Business Partnership, People Inc., Children's Home Childcare Center, Coyle Community Center, Augsburg College, the University of Minnesota, and a tribal council. In addition, a few schools were founded under the umbrella of an existing community-based organization that is designed to serve children and families.

The most common type of relationship with the community, one used by approximately one-third of Minnesota charter schools, involves the use of community-based learning opportunities for students that focus on the completion of a particular learning project. In these schools, older students are required to fulfill a community-service requirement as part of their instructional program. Notable examples of community-based activities include:

- Students complete structured apprenticeship programs with area businesses and organizations;

- Students develop construction skills by working for Habitat for Humanity;

- Students receive conflict resolution training through the efforts of the Citizens Council;

- Students learn science from a scientist via the Internet;

- Students plant a garden with the help of an architect;

- Student interns work at a child care program and recreation site under the auspices of the St. Paul Park and Recreation Department;

- Students read to the elderly at an area nursing home.

The remaining schools have relationships with community groups that are similar to conventional public schools. For example, in these charter schools, students make field trips to community sites as a learning experience, schools use authors to read to students, students volunteer to plant trees in the park, and students sort food for the community food drive. In addition, these schools may be the recipients of financial and inkind donations from community-based groups and organizations.

In Section IV we more closely examine the relationship of Minnesota charter schools to their sponsors.

Section IV: Relationship to Charter Sponsor

In Minnesota, a school board, community college, state university, technical college, University of Minnesota, or the State Board of Education may sponsor one or more charter schools. If a local school board elects not to sponsor a charter school, the applicant may appeal the school board's decision to the Minnesota State Board of Education provided two members of the non-accepting board voted to sponsor the school. Of the 16 charter schools that are part of this study, 14 are sponsored by local school boards and two are sponsored by the State Board of Education.

The sponsor's authorization for a charter school is a written contract signed by the sponsor and the charter school board of directors. The contract term may be up to three years. It must specify: (a) the requirements and procedures for program and financial audits; (b) how the school will comply with specific requirements of the charter legislation and Minnesota statutes regarding length of school year, applicable state and local health and safety requirements, and the education of students with disabilities; (c) provisions for student transportation; and (d) provisions for nonrenewal or termination of the contract.

While the legislation clearly authorizes school boards to decide whether or not the school district will serve as the charter sponsor, it specifies little about the more day-to-day relationships that develop between a charter school and its sponsoring school board. This section presents findings for the following guiding questions regarding this relationship:

- What is the relationship of charter schools to their sponsoring districts in terms of support, reporting and accountability?
- What types of support/oversight do sponsoring school boards provide to charter schools?
- What is the programmatic and fiscal impact of sponsorship on school districts?

Support by Sponsoring School Boards

Charter schools vary in their relationships to their sponsoring school boards with some sites having little or no contact with the board once the charter contract is approved. Others receive academic and administrative services from the sponsoring school district, either on an inkind or contractual basis. In 1995-1996, the most common services provided to charter schools by sponsoring school districts include transportation (used by 12 charter schools) and food services (used by three schools). Provided less frequently are insurance coverage, purchasing services, and the assignment of district special education staff at the charter school site (each used by one or two charter schools).

Reporting, Accountability, and Oversight

In general, the sponsoring school boards or district staff "do not get involved in charter management," a theme which also extends to involvement in accountability and oversight in a number of sites. The degree and types of oversight being carried out by sponsoring school boards varies tremendously across Minnesota charter schools. In many sites, the contract renewal process is used as the point at which the sponsoring school district exercises any oversight and asks the charter school to be accountable for student performance.

At one end of the continuum, staff from the sponsoring school district conduct their own annual evaluation of the school and submit the report to the charter school and local school board. At the other end of the continuum, there is no evidence of interaction between the sponsoring school district and the charter school for the purpose of accountability or oversight. In a majority of the sites (75 percent), however, some type of oversight procedures are being implemented. At these sites, the sponsoring school district staff (or state agency staff for the two sites sponsored by the State Board of Education) typically define their role as assuring students are learning and/or that appropriate fiscal practices are being followed. For example:

- One charter school commissioned an independent evaluation and provided a written report to the sponsoring school district to deal with a number of district concerns that arose during the first year of operations;

- Sponsoring school district staff worked with charter school representatives to establish guidelines to assess student performance;

- A charter school agreed to use the district's standardized testing regimen and to meet annually with a district-appointed committee;

- Some charter schools submit annual program evaluation reports (including financial audit information) to the sponsoring school board for review and meet with the sponsoring school board to review findings;

- Each charter school produces an annual financial audit report submitted to the sponsoring district;

Staff from the Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning make informal site visits on an annual basis to the sites sponsored by the State Board of Education to review particular program areas. Informal reports, including recommendations, are provided to the charter school staff.

Impact of Sponsorship on School Districts

We interviewed staff and parents affiliated with the charter schools, as well as a key informant from the host district office, regarding his/her impressions as to the programmatic and fiscal impact of sponsorship. In general, the respondents indicate that charter school sponsorship has had a minor impact on the host district. The absence of demonstrated impacts of the charter school on the surrounding schools and community, however, may be due to the respondents' lack of knowledge of impacts within the host school district.

While respondents from a few sites are able to articulate and substantiate the effect of charter schools on the surrounding schools/communities, most focused on identifying what they *hope* will happen. While these hopes are generally well meaning, at this time there is little evidence that mechanisms have been established to facilitate their realization.

At this stage, respondents identify the potential for impact in two areas. First, it is hoped that charter schools may better (or more cost effectively) meet the needs of particular subpopulations of students whose needs are not being met within the existing public schools. Respondents cited the need for: alternative instructional approaches for students with special learning needs, students who have dropped out or who are at risk of dropping out of area public schools, or students who are involved with the criminal justice system. At the same time, respondents acknowledge that if realized, this impact may in fact take the pressure off public schools to address the needs of these students within the conventional system.

Second, it is hoped that charter schools will promote and support change within conventional public schools as:

- A source of healthy competition with conventional public schools and/or a source of enhanced parental choice;
- Providers of inservice and technical assistance for public school staff regarding innovations (e.g., use of technology);
- A linkage to the community to foster a caring environment for "at risk" students and/or to benefit members of the community via service learning projects completed by students;
- Laboratories for field testing innovations that may be shared with the area schools and adopted/adapted by them; and
- Providers of technical assistance to other charter schools in the district and state regarding startup, etc.

At this point in the implementation of Minnesota charter schools, the existing evidence of impact related to change and innovation within the area schools and communities falls into three categories:

- Charter schools have served to further enhance parental choice options, an impact mentioned repeatedly by parents and students who choose to enroll in these schools;

- Charter school staff at one site have provided inservice for public school staff regarding use of technology for instructional purposes;

- High school age students involved in community service projects at a few sites benefit members of the community in a tangible way; for example, as they renovate housing, plant trees, and volunteer with the elderly.

In terms of financial and use of district personnel time, the impact on larger Minnesota school districts is reported as minimal; the major cost is in terms of staff time needed to work with charter applicants as they prepare their materials for review by the school board. Larger districts, in particular, view charter schools as a vehicle for serving difficult subpopulations of students who potentially are much more expensive to serve in an alternative setting. In the urban districts, charter schools are relieving overcrowding in the public schools.

At the same time, smaller sponsoring school districts particularly feel the loss of per pupil aid, particularly since it involves a few students per grade. Small districts are not able to respond by reducing a classroom at one particular grade-level. At this point in the data collection process, however, we do not have financial information regarding the strategies smaller districts have used to cope with the revenue short-fall.

The next section presents data regarding the characteristics of enrolled students and their performance as of fall, 1996.

Section V: Characteristics of Enrolled Students and their Performance

Legally a Minnesota charter school may not limit admission of students on the basis of intellectual ability, measures of achievement or aptitude, or athletic ability. Admission may, however, be limited to (a) students within a particular age group or grade level; (b) people who are eligible to participate in the graduation incentives program; or (c) residents of a specific geographic area where the percentage of the population of non-Caucasian people of that area is greater than the percentage of the non-Caucasian population in the congressional district in which the geographic area is located, as long as the school reflects the racial and ethnic diversity of the specific area.

A number of provisions of Minnesota's charter legislation emphasize the performance of students who enroll at the charter school. Specifically, one stated purpose of the legislation is to improve student learning. Sponsoring districts may terminate or not renew a charter contract for failure to meet the requirements of pupil performance contained in the contract.

This section provides data associated with both the characteristics of enrolled students and their performance in a number of areas associated with school success. Key guiding questions include:

- What types of students attend charter schools? Where were they before attending the charter school? Are they being successful?
- How well have charter schools worked as a desegregation tool?
- What is the impact of charter schools on student performance?

Admission Policies and Practices

Six of the 16 Minnesota charter schools report that they have special requirements for admissions other than proof of immunization, age, or residence. The additional requirements include submission of academic records, special student needs or aptitudes, and personal interviews (see Table 5.1).

Table 5.1: Admission Policies and Practices of Minnesota Charter Schools, Spring 1996

	Schools Reporting Admission Requirements		
	No	Yes	Not Applicable
Requirements other than immunization, age, residence	10	6	-
If yes, additional requirements include:			
• admissions test	6	0	10
• academic records	5	1	10
• special student needs	4	2	10
• special student aptitudes	5	1	10
• personal interviews	2	4	10
• racial/ethnic background to attain diversity	6	0	10
• other requirements	2	4	10

Note: Schools could select multiple response options.
Source: Phone Survey, Minnesota Charter Schools Evaluation, 1996 (n = 16 schools).

Characteristics of Enrolled Students

Prior to enrollment at a charter school, students in grades 6 through 12 report they attended school in the following settings:

- Regular public school (77 percent);
- Home school (12 percent);
- Private school (7 percent);
- Alternative programs/schools (3 percent).

Students who attended Minnesota charter schools in 1995-1996 spanned all major racial and ethnic categories and tended to represent a higher concentration of special populations (students with disabilities, limited English proficiency, or from families with limited incomes) than exist across the state as a whole (refer to Table 5.2). The range in percentage of students enrolled with particular demographic characteristics shows that Minnesota charter schools vary dramatically in their enrollment of concentrations of white, black, or American Indian students. Similarly, there is wide variation in the enrollment of students with disabilities, limited English proficiency, and from families with low incomes.

Table 5.2: Characteristics of Students Attending Minnesota Charter Schools, Spring 1996

Student Demographics	Average rate for Charter Schools		Average rate for Host Districts	
	%	Range	%	Range
Ethnic/racial composition				
• White, not of Hispanic origin	55	0-99	84	37-98
• Black, not of Hispanic origin	25	0-96	7	<1-40
• American Indian or Alaskan Native	10	0-96	2	<1-10
• Asian or Pacific Islander	8	0-73	5	<1-25
• Hispanic, regardless of race	2	0-20	2	<1- 7
Special populations				
• students with disabilities (active IEPs)	25	0-100	15	10-18
• students with limited English proficiency	10	0-100	5	0-21
• students eligible for free/reduced lunch program	47	0- 95	29	7-61
Gender				
• female	46	34-61	48	45-49
• male	54	39-66	52	51-54

Notes: The 14 Minnesota charter schools are located in 10 different communities, including Apple Rhonopin, Chaska, Crosby-Ironton, LeSueur-Henderson, Minneapolis, Redwood County, Stillwater, St. Louis County, St. Paul, and Waconia. Special education rates are based on PreK-12 enrollment.

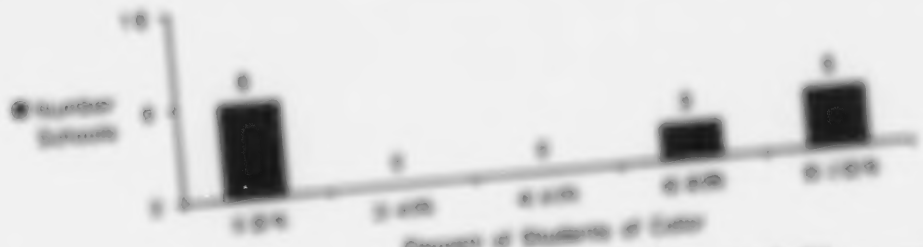
Sources: Phone Survey, Minnesota Charter School Evaluation, 1996 (n = 14 schools) and Dept. of CFL, school years 1994-95 or 1995-96.

Charter Schools as a Desegregation Tool

Half of the schools serve less than 20 percent students of color and the other half serve over 80 percent students of color (refer to Figure 5.3). These data indicate that Minnesota charter schools, at this time, are not necessarily functioning as a desegregation tool. As parents and students exercise their choice for a particular school, concentrations of students of color and students at risk for school failure are attending schools that are not funded at the level of schools in the sponsoring school district.[9]

[9] In Minnesota, a charter school receives the full average state per pupil revenue for enrolled students and is eligible for state and federal categorical funds comparable with other public schools. Charter schools are not eligible for any aid program that requires a local levy (e.g., for facilities, excess operations costs, community education, etc.).

Figure 5.1: Distribution of Students of Color in Minnesota Charter Schools, Spring 1996



Source: From Survey, Minnesota Charter School Evaluation, 1996, N = 31 schools.

Student Performance

Working collaboratively with representatives from each Minnesota charter school, we identified seven outcome areas and multiple indicators of student performance within each area that relate to the goals these schools have in common challenge related to an eighth outcome area, parent involvement, are reported in Section III). The seven outcome areas include:

- Presence and Participation;
- Academic Performance;
- Contribution and Citizenship;
- Physical Health;
- Personal and Social Adjustment;
- Responsibility and Independence;
- Satisfaction.

As described above, Minnesota charter schools are serving a very diverse subpopulation of students in terms of ethnic and racial background, economic status, and special status. The variation is dramatic between charter schools and has translated into different operating programs at each school. These differences must be kept in mind as findings about student performance are interpreted. Given the special subpopulations of students being served in at least half of the Minnesota charter schools, comparisons to the general student population of the sponsoring district should be considered with caution. In addition, there are several logistical factors that served to limit the collection of information related to the performance of students.

- Because student data were gathered via a written survey, we limited data collection to students in grades 6-12 (approximately 66 percent of the charter school student population as of fall, 1998).

- Due to the need to produce an interim report by January, 1997, data provided by students, staff and parents were collected only once during the fall of 1996.

- In order to establish an appropriate standard of comparison regarding the performance of charter school students and to aggregate data across the 19 charter schools, we relied as much as possible on survey instruments that are currently being used in Minnesota or across the nation.

- Since it was beyond the scope of this study to uniformly collect achievement data on students at all schools using the same instruments or methods, we relied on achievement data provided by each charter school. At this point in their development, only five schools are able to report pre-post data for students.

Given these factors, the findings that follow must be largely considered baseline information against which data collected subsequently may be compared. Where appropriate, we have described how students attending charter schools in Minnesota compare to their grade level peers across the state or the nation at this point in time.

Appendix B includes an overview of the sources of data for each indicator reported in this section and the overall response rates by charter school for each data collection instrument.

Processes and Participation

Indicator: Attendance rate during the 1996-1997 school year (last year for which complete data are available for 12 of the 19 charter schools)

The average attendance rates for charter schools are approximately the same as for their comparable sponsoring school districts. This attendance level should be viewed positively since more than half of the charter schools serve students which they define as at risk for school noncompletion and higher school dismissals. Specifically, during the 1996-1997 school year the attendance and participation rates for the 19 Minnesota charter schools are as follows:

- In 12 of the 16 charter schools the average attendance rate is 91 percent (with a range of 80 to 98 percent across the 12 charter schools) as compared to an average attendance rate in the nine sponsoring school districts of 94 percent (with a range of 89 to 95 percent).

- In 15 of the 16 charter schools, no students were suspended for absenteeism or tardiness.

Academic Performance

Indicator: Percent of student scoring above the 50th percentile on standardized tests of reading and math.

The 16 charter schools are using a variety of measures to assess the academic achievement of their students. Schools are using norm-referenced tests required by their sponsoring district, criterion-referenced tests, or multiple assessments including performance assessments and portfolios. A number of schools have just begun the process of documenting student achievement over time.

Using available achievement data from each school, we determined which standardized tests are being administered, to whom they are administered, when they are given, the percentage of students scoring above the 50th percentile on the test, and the current availability of pre-post scores on the same students at the individual schools.[19]

The information in Table 5.4 illustrates the variety of testing procedures and schedules used by the charter schools. Some charter schools use norm-referenced tests to assess all students, while others assess students in selected grade levels. A few charter schools elect to assess students using criterion-referenced tests that do not provide national comparisons. Results from 11 charter schools, using norm-referenced tests in spring 1996, were used to establish baseline data.[20]

- Baseline data from 11 charter schools indicates that concentrations of students (50 percent or more students) in six charter schools score below the 50th percentile on nationally normed *achievement* tests as of spring, 1996, demonstrating the special subpopulations of students choosing to enroll in selected Minnesota charter schools. These data should be viewed as a baseline for further comparison.

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[19] Given the small number of schools that currently have usable pre-post data (five of the 16 schools), these findings will be reported in the final report (due in July of 1997) when post-test data are available from all the schools.

[20] Three of 16 charter schools reported using alternate assessment approaches that cannot be aggregated across schools.

Table 5.4: Standardized Achievement Test Information for Minnesota Charter Schools, Spring 1996

Charter School (enrollment spring 1996)	Grades for which Test Scores Reported	Test Administered
• Bluffview Montessori (102)	2, 4	Stanford Achievement Test
• Cedar Riverside Community School (89)	1-4, 6, 7	California Achievement Test
• City Academy (60)	10-Adult	Test of Adult Basic Education
• Community of Peace Academy (173)	2-5	Metropolitan Achievement Test 7
• Dakota Open Charter School (50)	K-12	Woodcock Johnson
• Emily Charter School (80)	3, 5, 8	Iowa Test of Basic Skills
• Frederick Douglass Academy (56)	3, 4, 5	California Achievement Test
• Metro Deaf (33)	K-8	Brigance
• Minnesota New Country School (90)	7-12	Stanford Achievement Test
• New Heights School (41)	2, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11	California Achievement Test
• New Visions School (138)	1-7	California Achievement Test
• Parents Allied With Children and Teachers (176)	3, 5, 8	Iowa Test of Basic Skills
• Right Step Academy (109)	9-12	National Proficiency Exam (English subtest reported as Reading)
• Skills For Tomorrow (50)	10-12	Test of Adult Basic Education
• Toivola Meadowlands (170)	5, 8, 10	Stanford Achievement Test
• World Learner School of Chaska (24)	3	Stanford Achievement Test

Source: Information provided by Minnesota charter schools, Minnesota Charter Schools Evaluation, 1996.

Indicator: Percent passing the Minnesota basic graduation tests in reading and math.

Nine of the 16 charter schools in Minnesota enrolled students who were eligible to participate in the January 1996 pilot administration of the Minnesota basic graduation tests in reading and math; three of these schools report participation in this assessment. Overall, the performance data from these three schools indicate that:

- The proportion of charter school students passing the Minnesota basic graduation tests varied in comparison to the host districts; two out of three had a higher percentage of students passing these examines in reading and one out of two had a higher percentage passing in math. Note, one of the three schools reported results for reading only.

Indicator: Percent of parents reporting improved academic progress for their son or daughter.

Parents are an important source of information regarding the performance of their son or daughter, including academic performance (refer to Table 5.5). Overall, 50 percent or more of the parent respondents report their son or daughter has *improved* in the following areas since enrollment in the charter school:

- Motivation for learning;
- Confidence in abilities;
- Satisfaction with his/her own learning;
- Sense of responsibility;
- Academic performance;
- Satisfaction with his/her teachers;
- Relationships with friends; and
- Time spent studying.

Only one area, time spent with family, is reported as either *staying the same* or *becoming worse* by more than half of the parents of enrolled students.

Table 5.5: Parents' Perceptions of Changes in Student Performance Since Enrollment in Minnesota Charter Schools, Fall 1996

Performance Area	Percent Parents Reporting Change			
	Improved	Stayed Same	Became Worse	Not Applicable
• Motivation for Learning	80	14	2	3
• Confidence in Abilities	79	17	1	3
• Students' Satisfaction with Own Learning	72	22	2	5
• Sense of Responsibility	69	26	2	3
• Academic Performance	67	23	3	8
• Satisfaction with Teachers	66	25	3	6
• Relationships with Friends	57	36	2	5
• Time Spent Studying	54	32	4	11
• Higher Education Aspirations	50	33	2	16
• Higher Career Aspirations	41	34	2	24
• School or Class Attendance	36	44	1	18
• Participation in Extracurricular	28	40	5	27
• Time Spent with Family	28	59	3	10
• Participation in Athletics	22	41	6	31

Source: Parent Survey, Minnesota Charter Schools Evaluation, 1996 (n = range of 557 to 561 for individual items.

Contribution and Citizenship

Indicator: Percent of students who have been suspended or subjected to other disciplinary actions during the 1995-96 school year.

Directors or facilitators from 15 of the 16 charter schools provided information regarding student suspensions and expulsions during the 1995-1996 school year. Survey data indicate that:

- During the 1995-1996 school year, there were 86 suspensions for behaviors such as student violence, vandalism, student drug or alcohol abuse or insubordination from 10 of 15 charter schools (a range of 0 to 36 suspensions per school). The suspension rate for charter schools is lower than the estimated rate in K-12 public schools in Minnesota.

- Thirteen students from five different charter schools were asked to leave the school during the 1995-1996 school year; reasons included: excessive violence, inability to provide special education services, better program availability elsewhere, or poor attendance.

Indicator: Percent of students involved in criminal activity.

Students in grades 6 through 12 reported their involvement in selected criminal behaviors during the past year.[21] Statewide comparisons are available for grades 6, 9, and 12 (refer to Table 5.6). Generally, students attending charter schools report they engaged in vandalism and fighting at significantly higher rates than their grade-level peers across Minnesota. Self reports of shoplifting during the past year were reported at a significantly higher rate by those attending charter school in grades 6. As baseline information, these findings corroborate the impressions of charter school staff that many of these programs are serving higher proportions of students who engage in behaviors that are typically associated with being at risk for school failure.

Table 5.6: Student Involvement in Criminal Activity, Fall 1996

	Charter School		Statewide		
	%	*Enq*	%	*Enq*	*Probability*
Grade 6					
• Vandalism	54	61	24	50,763	**
• Physical fights	54	61	39	50,763	*
• Shoplifting	27	62	14	50,763	*
Grade 9					
• Vandalism	52	56	35	45,534	*
• Physical fights	55	58	39	45,534	*
• Shoplifting	40	58	34	45,534	NS
Grade 12					
• Vandalism	39	43	23	30,625	*
• Physical fights	35	43	22	30,625	*
• Shoplifting	19	43	28	30,625	NS

Note: A chi-square test was used to determine the probability that the percentages in the two groups were significantly different. NS indicates non-significance, * indicates a probability of p<.05 and ** indicates a probability of p<.01.
Source: Student Survey, Minnesota Charter Schools Evaluation, 1996 (n = respondents per item).

[21] Since students were asked to indicate their involvement in these anti-social behaviors at least one time in the past year, their responses may reflect activities prior to their enrollment at the charter school if they are first year students.

Indicators: Number and description of school community projects from the 1995-1996 school year.

Percent of students involved in each reported community project during the 1995-1996 school year.

There is wide variation in the number of community projects and the level of student participation in these projects across charter schools in Minnesota. Sixteen charter school directors/facilitators report that on average charter schools participated in six community projects during the 1995-1996 school year (ranging between 0 to 20 projects). In terms of individual charter school students:

- Student participation in at least one community project ranges from 10 to 100 percent of the overall student body in the charter schools offering one or more of these projects during 1995-1996.

- The proportion of students who participated in projects varies widely by charter school; three schools report an average participation rate of over 50 percent and nine schools report an average student participation rate between 25 and 50 percent.

Physical Health

Indicator: Percent of students reporting engagement in high risk behaviors.

Charter school students in grades 6 through 12 were asked to indicate how often they have used cigarettes, alcohol, or marijuana. Statewide comparisons reporting use of these chemicals at least once a month are available for grades 6, 9, and 12 (refer to Table 5.7).

While the responses of charter school students in grade 6 are quite similar to their peers across the state, charter school students in grades 9 and 12 report they engage in some high risk behaviors at a slightly higher rate than their peers. These findings support a conclusion that many Minnesota charter schools are serving high school students who are more likely to engage in high risk behaviors than their peers.

Table 5.7: Student Involvement in High Risk Behaviors, Fall 1996

	Charter School		Statewide		
	%	*n*	%	*n*	*Probability*
Grade 6					
• Cigarettes	8	61	4	50,763	NS
• Alcohol	3	59	4	50,763	NS
• Marijuana	2	58	1	50,763	NS
Grade 9					
• Cigarettes	34	56	22	45,534	**
• Alcohol	27	56	20	45,534	**
• Marijuana	16	56	12	45,534	NS
Grade 12					
• Cigarettes	52	42	30	30,625	**
• Alcohol	35	40	37	30,625	NS
• Marijuana	28	58	14	30,625	**

Note: A chi-square test was used to determine the probability that the percentages in the two groups were significantly different. NS indicates non-significance, * indicates a probability of $p<.05$ and ** indicates a probability of $p<.01$.

Source: Student Survey, Minnesota Charter Schools Evaluation, 1996 (*n* = respondents per item).

When specifically asked if they used drugs and alcohol more or less often since enrolling at the charter school, students in grades 6 through 12 are equally divided in their responses except for the use of cigarettes. A higher percentage of students indicate they smoke more since enrolling at the charter school.[1] Our data indicate that:

- Seventeen percent of charter school students in grades 6 through 12 report they use cigarettes more since enrolling at the charter school, 11 percent indicate they use alcohol more, and 8 percent indicate an increase in the use of marijuana (*n* = range of 299-306 by item).

- Eleven percent of charter school students in grades 6 through 12 indicate they use cigarettes less since starting the charter school, 11 percent indicate they use alcohol less, and 10 percent indicate a decrease in the use of marijuana (*n* = range of 299-306 by item).

Personal and Social Adjustment

Indicator: Percent of students satisfied with self

Charter school students in grades 6, 9 and12 responded to a series of questions related to their personal and social adjustment. Similar to their peers across the state, most charter school students agree they are satisfied with themselves (range of 73 to 95 percent by grade, number of respondents

[1] Some changes in behavior would be expected as students get older.

ranges from 43 to 62) and are able to do things as well as most other people their age (range of 85 to 98 percent by grade; number of respondents ranges from 43 to 61).

When asked if their level of satisfaction with themselves has changed since enrolling in the charter school, 51 percent of the students report they are more satisfied with themselves, while 38 percent indicate no change in their level of satisfaction with themselves, and 10 percent indicate they are less satisfied (n = 304).

Indicator: Percent of students getting along with others

Charter school students in grades 6 through 12 were asked about how they get along with other students and the degree to which cultural differences are respected at the school. Comparisons are available for grades 6, 9 and 12 (refer to Table 5.8). A higher percentage of charter school sixth grade students, as compared to similar grade-level peers across Minnesota, report that most or all of the students are friendly at the school they now attend.

Compared to the school previously attended, about half of the charter school students indicate that students are friendlier at the charter school while 10 percent describe students as being less friendly (n = 308).

When asked about the degree to which students at their school have made fun of, or threatened students of different races or backgrounds, students in grade 12 are more likely than their peers to indicate that few or none of the students at their school engage in threatening behaviors. The responses of students in grades 6 and 9 are similar to their peers across the state.

Compared to the school previously attended, 39 percent of the charter school students indicate that fewer students make fun of or threaten students of different races or backgrounds while 17 percent report that more students engage in these behaviors.

Table 5.8: Student Self-Reports of Getting Along with Others, Fall 1996

	Charter School		Statewide		
	%	*Freq*	%	*Freq*	*Probability*
Grade 6					
• Student friendliness	72	60	56	50,763	*
• Respect for differences	72	58	71	50,763	NS
Grade 9					
• Student friendliness	67	55	50	45,536	NS
• Respect for differences	59	50	56	45,536	NS
Grade 12					
• Student friendliness	74	42	60	30,625	NS
• Respect for differences	71	41	54	30,625	*

*Note: A chi-square test was used to determine the probability that the percentages in the two groups were significantly different. NS indicates non-significance, * indicates a probability of p<.05 and ** indicates a probability of p<.01.*

Source: Student Survey, Minnesota Charter Schools Evaluation, 1996 (n = respondents per item).

Responsibility and Independence

Indicator: Percent of staff reporting satisfaction with student responsibility and discipline.

More than half of the charter school teachers indicate they are *satisfied or very satisfied* with student responsibility and discipline in the following areas:

- The *degree of responsibility* students show toward their school assignments (56 percent of teachers indicate they are satisfied or very satisfied; n = 130).
- The extent to which students act in a *self-disciplined manner* (54 percent of teachers indicate they are satisfied or very satisfied; n = 138).
- Overall *student responsibility and discipline* at their schools (57 percent of teachers indicate they are satisfied or very satisfied; n = 137).

Indicator: Percent of students reporting responsible use of daily time.

Of the charter school students in grades 6 through 12, 25 percent report spending *six or more hours per week* engaging in the following activities (refer to Table 5.9):

- Hanging out;
- Watching television or videos;
- Working for pay; or
- Doing chores at home/babysitting for the family.

Looked at another way, we see that since enrolling at the charter school, students in grades 6 through 12 report spending more time in selected activities (refer to Table 5.10). Although some behavioral changes (e.g., working) are expected just as a result of getting older, 25 percent or more of students report spending *more time*:

- Doing homework and studying;
- Reading for pleasure;
- Doing volunteer work;
- Doing chores at home;
- Working for pay; and/or
- Hanging out.

However, 25 percent or more of these students report spending less time engaging in musical activities (i.e., band, choir, music lessons, etc.), playing sports on a school team, and/or watching television or videos since enrolling in a charter school. Further, 25 percent or more report that in a typical week, they spend no time (refer to Table 5.9):

- Playing sports on a school team;
- Participating in a musical activity (i.e., band, choir, music lessons);
- Participating in clubs or organizations outside of school;
- Doing volunteer work or community service; or
- Reading for pleasure.

Table 5.9: Activities Engaged in by Students in Grades 6 through 12 During A Typical Week, Fall 1996

Activity	6 + hours	1-5 hours	0 hours
• Hanging Out	54	37	9
• Watching TV or Videos	30	56	6
• Work For Pay (Including Baby-sitting For Others)	36	41	22
• Chores At Home/Babysitting For Family	25	60	15
• Homework/Study	22	64	14
• Reading For Pleasure	15	61	25
• Playing Sports On A School Team	10	15	75
• Clubs or Organizations Outside of School	9	30	57
• Volunteer Work Or Community Service	8	40	52
• Band, Choir, Orchestra, Music Lessons or Practicing Voice or Instrument	7	31	63

Source: Student Survey, Minnesota Charter Schools Evaluation, 1996. (n = 955 to 1115 by item).

Table 3.10: Time Spent by Students in Grades 4 Through 12 in Various Activities Since Enrolling in Minnesota Charter Schools, Fall 1998

Activity	Time Now Compared To Old School: More		Less	
	%	Avg.	%	Avg.
• Homework/Study	42	(3)	23	70
• Hanging Out	39	(17)	21	67
• Work For Pay (Including Baby-sitting For Others)	36	(10)	13	38
• Reading For Pleasure	30	(6)	29	56
• Volunteer Work or Community Service	25	75	36	66
• Chores At home/Baby-sitting For Family	25	74	25	63
• Clubs or Organizations Outside of School	20	59	21	62
• Band, Choir, Orchestra, Music Lesson or Practicing Voice or Instrument	15	46	31	93
• Watching TV or Videos	15	46	30	89
• Playing Sports On A School Team	14	42	29	72

Source: Student Survey, Minnesota Charter Schools Evaluation, 1998. (n = range by item from 394-902 by grade level)

Satisfaction

Indicator: Parent satisfaction with various aspects of the school

Parents of charter school students were asked to indicate their satisfaction with the school program from two perspectives. First, they were asked to indicate their overall satisfaction with the school by giving it a letter grade on an A, B, C, D, F grading scale. Second, they were asked to indicate their degree of satisfaction with 13 programmatic aspects of a school program (refer to Table 3.11).[1] Key findings include:

> A large majority of parent respondents (89 percent) give the charter school their son or daughter attends a grade of A or B, while only three percent give the school a D or F. In a recent nationwide survey of parents (Glenn, Rose & Gallup, 1998), fewer parents gave their child's school an A or B (68 percent) while a larger percentage (11 percent) gave their child's school a D or F.

[1] Minnesota charter schools vary in their approach to administration as described in Section II. Satisfaction with school administration, therefore, could have been defined differently by respondents depending upon the structure used at the individual charter school.

Parents for whom English is not their first language had the option of completing a modified parent survey in their native language. The results for this task were similar to the larger group of respondents.

- Seventy-five percent or more of the parents report they are satisfied with the following aspects of the charter school their son or daughter attends: parent involvement, the school curriculum, the teaching staff, student discipline, the school administration (or the performance of administrative functions at the school), home/school communication, and the school's academic expectations of students.

- Aspects of charter schools in which 10 percent or more of the parents express dissatisfaction include: extracurricular activities, school buildings and their maintenance, the availability of technology, the availability of supplies, and school transportation.

Table 1.11: Parental Satisfaction with Minnesota Charter Schools, Fall 1998

	Percent of Parents Reporting		
	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither
• Teachers	89	5	6
• Home/School Communication	89	5	7
• School's Academic Expectation of Students	87	6	8
• Curriculum	87	6	8
• School Administration	76	4	19
• Student Discipline	77	8	15
• Parent Involvement	76	5	19
• Availability of Technology	69	13	17
• School Buildings/Maintenance	60	19	20
• Availability of Supplies	65	15	20
• Transportation	59	16	25
• Extracurriculars	54	10	36
• Support Services	65	7	27

Source: Parent Survey, Minnesota Charter School Evaluation, 1998, as a sample of 382 of 392 in total.

Indicator: Student satisfaction with their charter school experience

Charter school students in grades 4 through 12 were asked to rate their satisfaction with eight aspects of charter school programs (refer to Table 1.12). Overall, students tend to be very satisfied with the charter school their parents. The responses of Minnesota charter school students, however, are similar to students from across the country who have completed the same survey. Specifically:

- Fifty-five to 68 percent of the students report they are happy with the following aspects of the charter school they attend: the teachers, fellow students, the school work, the school building, including supplies and building upkeep, and communication.

- Areas in which 10 percent or more of the students report they are unhappy include many of the same areas where students at the school report being happy with: the teachers, their fellow students, the school work, student activities, student discipline, decisionmaking opportunities, the school building, including supplies and building upkeep, and communication.

Table 3.10: Student Satisfaction With Various Aspects of the Minnesota Charter Schools, Fall 1999

	Percent of Students Reporting		
	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]
• Teachers	84	10	10
• Fellow Students	81	16	14
• Communication	79	16	17
• Schoolwork	77	17	26
• School Building, Supplies, and Upkeep	73	19	26
• Decision-Making Opportunities	67	29	26
• Student Discipline	64	26	29
• Student Activities	61	34	27

Source: Comprehensive Assessment of School Environments, Student Satisfaction Survey, Minnesota Charter Schools Evaluation, 1999 (n = [illegible] of 30 in 29 schools).

Looking at the average student ratings by charter school demonstrates the variation in student satisfaction across schools and activities (refer to Table 3.11). Comparing the average ratings that Minnesota charter students give their schools, we see the satisfaction level of students in a few schools is above average in a number of areas when compared to the ratings of students across the country who completed the same survey for their schools. In four Minnesota charter schools, students report less satisfaction with student activities than do students nationally.

Figure 9.1: Satisfaction of Families to Student Enrollment Through the Most Recent Minnesota Charter Schools, Fall 1998

Subscales	Number of Charter Schools		
	Above Average	Average	Below Average
• Teachers	2	7	0
• Fellow Students	0	9	0
• Communication	1	8	0
• Schoolwork	2	7	0
• School Building, Supplies, and Upkeep	0	9	0
• Student Discipline	1	8	0
• Student Activities	0	9	0
• Decision Making Opportunities	2	7	0

Note: Applied scores are T scores (M = 50, SD = 10). T scores between 45 and 55 are considered as average. T scores over 55 are considered as above average. T scores under 45 are considered as falling within the below average range.
Source: Cooperative Assessment of School Environments, Student Satisfaction Survey, Minnesota Charter Schools Evaluation, 1998, p. 2-3.

Indicator: Percent of students eligible for re-enrollment who re-enroll for the 1998-1999 school year

In general, re-enrollment may be viewed as an indicator of satisfaction with a charter school or even dissatisfaction (excluding students who are not eligible for re-enrollment because they have completed the highest grade level available at the school). There can, however, be exceptions. For example, at least one Minnesota charter school has a goal of returning students to their home school when sufficient academic progress has been made. Also, re-enrollment may not be an indicator of satisfaction for all schools.

Considering those students who were eligible to re-enroll for the 1998-1999 school year, 9 (11 of the 12 Minnesota charter schools, approximately) report that 91 percent chose to do so (with a range of 69 to 100 percent by school).

The following section explores the factors associated with charter school success. Enrollment as one aspect of success will be explored in greater detail. Findings related to the learning opportunities afforded enrolled students and the use of different and alternative teaching methods

Section VI: Factors Associated with Charter School Success

A number of the evaluation questions which guided this study focus on the characteristics of charter schools that make them successful. We looked to the purposes of Minnesota's charter school legislation for a definition of success. Thus, for the purposes of this study, *charter school success* refers to the extent to which these schools:

- Improve student learning;
- Increase learning opportunities for pupils;
- Encourage the use of different and innovative teaching methods;
- Require the measurement of learning outcomes and create different and innovative forms of measuring outcomes;
- Establish new forms of accountability for schools; or
- Create new professional opportunities for teachers, including the opportunity to be responsible for the learning program at the school site.

This section focuses on two aspects of success not covered in previous sections: findings related to the learning opportunities afforded enrolled students and the use of different and innovative teaching methods. We then use these findings, and findings from previous sections, to discern answers to the following guiding evaluation questions:

- What characteristics seem to make charter schools successful? Are all charter schools equally successful? If not, are there characteristics of "more" successful schools? What are critical conditions for charter school success? What are the impediments to success?
- What organizational and educational policies and strategies are associated with enhanced student outcomes?
- What are other impacts of charter schools on the school, staff, parents, and community? What affects these impacts?

Learning Opportunities Afforded Enrolled Students

Minnesota charter schools are most different from more conventional public schools in terms of their size. In the spring of 1996, average student enrollment was 96 students, with a range of 24 to 176 students. Similarly, class sizes tended to be smaller with an average student-to-instructional staff ratio of 12-to-1. Parents and teachers, in particular, attribute the opportunity for expanded learning opportunities to these differences.

In addition, charter schools use various approaches to expand or enhance the learning opportunities of students:

- An extended day, extended year, or summer program for enrolled students;

- A four-period day to permit longer class periods;

- Different learning opportunities for students, both in the school setting and the community. For example:
  - the opportunity to work individually at their own pace;
  - the chance to engage in peer-based cooperative learning;
  - the use of flexible scheduling to permit students the opportunity to work at home, in the community, or at the school site; and
  - the use of service learning, internships, apprenticeships, and job coaches to assist students in summer employment settings;

- Multi-age or multi-grade grouping of students in each classroom;

- Co-location of the school program at a public recreational center that fosters the connection of students to their peers and other adults or the reliance on community-based resources such as the public library or the YWCA to support learning.

Innovative Teaching Methods

The teaching methods used in Minnesota's charter schools vary widely, drawing both from "progressive educational thought" and "conventional" educational approaches. The strong common thread is the commitment of the instructional staff to their chosen approach, and their efforts over the past few years to bring their collective visions to reality. In some charter schools, teachers have revised their original plans or realized that they must set priorities as they work to develop the instructional program over a number of years. At this point, unique and innovative teaching methods and approaches being implemented in charter schools include:

- Commitment by staff and parents to a particular educational philosophy, for example,
  - the Montessori philosophy;
  - an Afrocentric view of the world;
  - a bi-cultural, bi-lingual emphasis with students who are deaf or hard-of-hearing;
  - a code of conduct which includes respect for self and others, for learning, property, and for the environment as well as following directions and acting safely;
  - the use of a "structured, disciplined, and supportive" learning environment as techniques that include the use of punishment with both individual students and the group to promote compliance with school rules and academic success; or
  - a totally student-centered approach that places the teacher in the role of advisor or coach;

- Students developing their own instructional experiences that flow from standards-based competencies tied to Minnesota's graduation standards;

- Curriculum and instruction that are organized to address Minnesota's graduation standards or the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS);

- Use of curriculum-based measurement as an alternative or addition to more static, one-time only approaches to student assessment in order to help teachers systematically monitor student progress and adjust their instruction to improve students' learning;

- Use of approaches that address the special needs of early adolescents, including cooperative learning, "de-tracking," and establishing close relationships between students and teachers;

- Use of team teaching and thematic curriculum units woven across language arts, math, science, and social sciences;

- Classroom settings that are less structured and more informal, with opportunities for hands-on or project-based learning experiences while maintaining high expectations for individual progress;

- Full access to computers, permitting students to learn meaningful and challenging tasks, and develop higher-order thinking and problem solving skills via the use of the Internet, computer simulation programs, spread sheet programs, and word processing;

- Particular learning techniques, including a "brain gym" and neurofeedback.

Policies and Strategies Associated with Enhanced Student Outcomes

As part of the final report (July 1997), we will use pre-post student performance data to begin to discern the characteristics of charter schools that are associated with enhanced student achievement.

Staff and parents associated with Minnesota charter schools cite the following factors:

- Smaller class sizes, with lower staff-to-student ratios;

- Development of a close working relationship among staff, parents, and students;

- Use of a particular instructional approach or philosophy.

The next sections presents an analysis of Minnesota's charter legislation, including comparisons of key legislative provisions and policies and charter schools growth to other states with charter legislation.

Section VII: Policy Considerations

Previous sections describe how key provisions of Minnesota's charter legislation are being implemented in 16 schools that have operated as charter schools from one to four years. This section focuses on examining policies and administrative practices that may inhibit or promote implementation at the school level. As Lori Mulholland (1996) writes:

> *The people who first developed and promoted the charter school concept (i.e., Ray Budde, Albert Shanker, Ted Kolderie, Ember Reichgott Junge and Becky Kelso) originally envisioned the ideal model of a charter school as a legally and financially autonomous public school (no tuition, religious affiliation, or selective student admissions) that would operate much like a private business -- free from non-essential state laws and district regulations, and accountable more for student outcomes rather than for processes or inputs (such as Carnegie Units and teacher certification requirements). In the ideal situation, a charter school would also face few start-up barriers. For example, the number of schools that could be formed and the types of organizations that could form them would have few (or no) limits, more than one option would be available for gaining approval of a charter, and an appeals process would guarantee organizers recourse if their charter was denied.*

Key guiding evaluation questions addressed in this section include:

- How does the Minnesota charter school law compare to law in other states? What are perceived strengths and weaknesses of the charter school law? How does the growth of charter schools in Minnesota compare to other states? How do current funding levels affect charter schools? Is the system of sponsorship operating effectively?
- How effectively is the contract development/renewal process working? How effective and efficient is the State Board decision making process for approving sponsors proposals? How effective and efficient is the State Board decision making process for directly sponsoring charter schools?
- How effective has the Department of Children, Families and Learning been in supporting charter schools? What have other states done, as compared to Minnesota, to support the growth of charter schools?

Charter School Growth and Legislation

During the 1995-96 school year, an estimated 252 charter schools were operating in 15 states under the provisions of state charter school laws. Thirteen percent of these schools opened in 1992 or 1993, 25 percent opened in 1994, and 58 percent opened in 1995. The remaining three percent started offering instruction to students in 1996.

Of the charter schools in operation in 1995-1996, 82 percent were located in four states: California (92 charter schools under legislation enacted in

1992), Arizona (47 charter schools under legislation enacted in 1994), Michigan (43 charter schools under legislation enacted in 1994), and Colorado (24 charter schools under legislation enacted in 1994). An additional 13 percent were located in Minnesota (17 schools under legislation enacted in 1991, one of which has since closed) and Massachusetts (15 schools under legislation enacted in 1993). The remaining five percent are spread across Georgia (legislation enacted in 1992), Hawaii (1994), New Mexico (1993), and Wisconsin (1993).

While the number of charter schools is growing, these schools still represent a very small proportion of the number of public schools in the four states with the largest concentrations of charter schools (California, 1.2 percent; Arizona, 3.8 percent; Michigan, 1.3 percent; Colorado, 1.7 percent).[9] In Minnesota, charter schools represented 1.1 percent of the total number of public elementary and secondary schools in the state during 1995-96.

As of the 1996-97 school year, an additional 15 states and the District of Columbia have enacted some variation of a charter school law; the total number of operating charter schools is estimated to exceed 400 in 1997. Given this projected growth and the likelihood of further amendments of existing charter legislation by states, it is too soon to draw conclusions regarding the growth of charter schools in Minnesota as compared to other states.

Comparisons of Minnesota Charter Legislation to Other States

In recent years, a number of policy researchers have judged legislative components of state laws related to charter schools against some perceived ideal. Differences in categorization schemes (strong versus weak or expansive versus restrictive) have spawned debates as to the "right way" to judge charter laws. Since these analyses are already available to the interested reader, we focused our analysis on 12 legislative components that are thought to facilitate the development of autonomous charter schools (Bierlein & Mulholland, 1995; Ruechlin, 1996; and the Institute for Responsive Education, 1996). Since states, including Minnesota, continue to amend their charter laws this analysis represents the status at this time.

- Number of schools permitted. Minnesota law currently permits up to 40 charter schools. A charter contract is for up to three years, and may be renewed for three-year periods. The range in other states is from three plus schools in Missouri to an unlimited number in Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, and Pennsylvania. In many states, the term of a charter school is five years.

- Eligible sponsors. Minnesota currently gives primary approval authority to the local education agency, with a provision that up to three

[9] Statistics comparing the number of charter schools to the number of public elementary and secondary schools located in each state using 1994-1995 data from the report *School facilities: Profiles of school conditions by state* by the United States General Accounting Office (1996).

schools may be sponsored by a public college or university. While a number of other states have limited sponsorship to local education agencies, intermediate school districts, and/or public higher education institutions, four variations are also evident: (1) approval authority rests with the state board of education or a newly created state board for charter schools; (2) individual school districts apply to the state board of education on behalf of the charter program requesting sponsorship; (3) approval is required by both the local school board and the state board of education; and (4) the charter applicant may choose at what level (district- or state-level) the school is sponsored.

- **Eligible operators.** Minnesota permits one or more licensed teachers to form and operate an outcome-based school. Approximately half of the other states with charter laws permit other types of groups or individuals to start a charter school, including parents or other citizens, nonprofit organizations, businesses, or unspecified others.

- **Eligible schools.** Minnesota permits existing public and private schools to convert to charter school status and new schools to "start from scratch." Most other states are similar to Minnesota, but a few allow only existing public schools to become charter schools.

- **Appeals process for denied charters.** Currently in Minnesota, if a local school board rejects a charter application but at least two board members vote in favor, the applicant may appeal to the State Board of Education. Only a few states do not offer an appeals process. Other states offer "second chance" appeals, including unrestricted appeals to the state board of education, a public hearing by the state board of education and potential for an override of the local board's judgment, or placement on a public ballot. A limited number of states provide for technical assistance and negotiations for those denied by local school boards.

- **Evidence of local support.** Minnesota does not require evidence of a specified level of support from teachers, parents, or community members for start-up charter schools. For conversions, 90 percent of the teachers must demonstrate support. Approximately half of the other states with charter laws require approval or support from teachers, parents, students, or community members. In addition, in states that allow only conversion schools, the laws vary as to the requirements for local support.

- **Blanket waiver from state education laws and regulations.** Minnesota waives state education laws and rules except for those specifically provided for in the charter law. Examples of laws not waived include: teacher certification; health and safety; anti-discrimination, including the education of students with disabilities; length of school year; pupil transportation provision; financial audit procedures; the Pupil Fair Dismissal Act; and the public school fee law. Just under 50 percent of the other state laws either do not provide for a "blanket" waiver from state education laws and regulations or require charter schools to negotiate waivers with sponsors on an case-by-case

basis. A few states do not require teachers to be certified; charter legislation in a number of other states is described as "unclear as to certification requirements."

- **Exemption from collective bargaining.** Minnesota gives charter schools complete control over personnel decisions (hiring, dismissal, salary structure, etc.). Charter school employees in Minnesota may organize a collective bargaining unit which may remain part of the bargaining unit within the sponsoring district if all the involved parties agree. In most states, legislation is unclear as to whether teachers are required to be members of the union local. In some states, teacher exemptions may be negotiated as part of the charter agreement.

- **Legal autonomy.** While Minnesota charter schools are legally autonomous entities, they remain under the jurisdiction of an existing school district in many other states.

- **Funding process.** In Minnesota, charter schools receive the full average state per pupil revenue directly from the state and are eligible for state and federal categorical funds comparable with other public schools. In practice, charter schools report they have difficulty applying for these funds due to the lack of staff time and the complexity of the application process. Charter schools are not eligible for any aid program that requires a local levy (e.g., facilities, excess referenda costs, community education, etc.). Funding other than that received for operational, maintenance or capital facilities may be used only for planning or to start-up. Funds not spent for the purpose for which they were intended must be returned. In many states, funding levels are negotiated on a school-by-school basis, and flow through the districts to the charter school.

- **Fiscal autonomy.** Minnesota gives charter schools control over their own budgets, subject to the same financial audits, audit procedures, and audit requirements as a school district. In a number of states, a charter school's autonomy is negotiated on a school-by-school basis. Charter schools, in a few states, do not have fiscal autonomy from the host district.

- **Start-up funds.** Minnesota does not provide state funds for charter school start-up expenses. A few states provide funds for planning grants or for costs associated with renovating or remodeling existing buildings.

Perceived Strengths and Weaknesses of Minnesota's Charter Law

Staff and parents who are affiliated with a charter school, as well as representatives of the sponsoring district or State Board of Education, commented on the strengths and weaknesses of Minnesota's charter law. Many of respondents appear to have used the frame of reference that since Minnesota does have operating charter schools, the actual question of interest is what aspects of the legislation work to promote or inhibit the

effective operation of existing charter schools. As would be expected, however, the comments of some respondents may also reflect their general support or opposition to the charter school concept. As such, one respondent's perceived strength might represent another respondent's perceived weakness.

Perceived strengths of Minnesota's charter law include:

- The opportunity to start a school and the relative ease in the application and approval process;
- Assurance that schools are not elitist via the clarity of the law in terms of who charter schools can serve;
- Authority that charter school boards of directors have over staff hiring and dismissal;
- An emphasis on school performance which gives a group that really believes in something the chance to deviate from the standard practices of the school district;
- Opportunities and protections afforded teachers who have the option to take a leave of absence from the school district to teach in a charter school.

The perceived weaknesses include:

- Lack of startup funds for charter schools;
- Limitations placed on charter schools in raising external funds;
- Lack of provision for charter school support, including startup funds and provisions for processes to get accurate, timely, answers to questions about applicable state policies and practices;
- Lack of access to full funding, particularly local aid, for enrolled students;
- Lack of access for the renovation, upkeep, and repair of school facilities;
- Limitations on the use of funds to purchase property;
- Proportionate loss of revenue by small school districts that may put them in financial jeopardy.

Areas on which Minnesota respondents are divided

- Sponsorship by local districts. Some respondents view limiting sponsorship to local school districts with a limited appeals process to be a healthy form of screening and quality control; others view these restrictions as overly rigid requirements.

- Membership on the board of directors. Some respondents view Minnesota's requirement that a majority of the board must be teachers as a positive feature which allows knowledgeable individuals to make decisions; others view the restriction as creating an overwhelming situation for teachers as they try to balance board, program development, and teaching responsibilities.

- Teacher licensure. Some respondents view this requirement as a method of quality control on the instructional program; others view the restriction as an overly rigid requirement that limits the opportunity to recruit the instructional staff and fulfill programmatic goals/objectives.

- The degree to which the law grants "basic" charter schools more bureaucratic separation and the state agency bureaucracy. Some respondents view the law as a unique opportunity for teachers or for a school, which acknowledge the opportunity at the school site level to have more decisionmaking authority over classroom practices and which schedules for teachers, but see little relief from state and local district policies and practices (e.g., dealing with financial reporting procedures, the applicable procedures for categorical funds, school lunch data, district transportation schedules that restrict the schedule of the charter school, bookkeeping requirements, and the like) dominant respondents.

Contract Development and Renewal Process

Findings related to the contract development and renewal process are limited to the responsibilities of charter schools/sponsoring school districts respondents who have successfully completed the application or renewal process. (Charter applicants whose proposals have been rejected were not queried thoroughly.) A majority of the operating charter schools in Minnesota have not yet undergone contract negotiations regarding the renewal of their charter contract.

In terms of the review and approval of initial charter applications, both the respondents from charter schools and from sponsoring school districts found the process to evolving and smooth. Many of the respondents, however, complained of a lack of consistency in the criteria being used by school board members as they consider charter applications. Due to the lack of consistency, some respondents would prefer all charters to be granted by the State Board of Education as an controversial appeals process.

In terms of the review process for charter renewals by the State Board of Education, the timing of the review is typically based on the availability of student performance data once at the end of the school year. Since the State

[illegible]

[illegible]

Support to Charter Schools

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- [illegible]

[illegible]

- [illegible]

- [illegible]

- [illegible]

- [illegible] award information about which federal and state regulations have been waived for charter schools in Minnesota;
- Assistance in developing funds from various state and federal sources, particularly Title I funds;
- Technical assistance and support for charter school board members, particularly related to the development of bylaws and decisionmaking;
- Resource information and technical assistance for charter schools and sponsoring school districts and their school boards as they approach the contract renewal process.

Support a Minnesota charter school applicant and schools under how a participation staff person in the Department of Children, Families and Learning who is available to assist applicants and also regularly provides contact information and access staff charter school conferences. The University assists approximately 40 agencies in the state as charter school sponsors. The charter unit does not form charter school applications and coordinates the federal charter school programs, including the application process and awarding of federal grants. The contact [illegible] help and provides forms for providing charter school applicants and potential school district sponsors in the application and contract development process, including:

- The affidavit of intent to sponsor a newly created charter school that must be completed by the sponsoring school district;
- A copy of the Minnesota charter school law;
- Instructions for preparing a charter school contract and a "model" contract agreement;
- A directory of Minnesota charter schools; and
- The format for an annual progress evaluation and reporting system for charter schools that was adopted by the State Board of Education in 1995.

[illegible]. the Department staff person serves as the contact person for the two charter schools that are sponsored by the State Board of Education. He has coordinated one visit to these schools for monitoring and technical purposes to the development and operation of their instructional programs. Also, the agency staff have prior to the Department as a possible of charter sponsorship that charter schools or sponsoring school districts may form once a school is operating, particularly in the areas of school finance, special education, and pupil transportation.

Section VIII: Conclusions

This concluding section extracts major themes from findings presented earlier in the report to address the three overall policy questions that guided the study:

- *Are Minnesota charter schools doing what they were designed to do?*
- *Are charter schools successful?*
- *Are the charter schools improving student achievement?*

In the second part of this section, we derive implications that these themes have for the further development and implementation of charter schools in Minnesota.

Themes

A significant motivation for the development of charter schools in Minnesota is a belief that the creation of new schools that are (a) responsive to parents and educators' visions, and (b) freed from nonessential state laws and district regulations while being accountable for their results, will stimulate educational reform. Charter school proponents are responding, in part, to a growing belief that our public schools -- and professional educators entrapped in them -- are simply unable to organize in ways that are different and/or more effective than their current mode of operation.

Charter schools may come to serve as an important stimulus for change in Minnesota. The assumption that encouraging many charter schools to flourish as an approach to systemic public school improvement, however, may be unrealistic. Simply put: Starting new schools is very hard work. We see from the 16 operating Minnesota charter schools that lack of resources, difficulties in balancing planning and implementation, and environmental pressures are a fact of life for most new schools, and even for some "conversion" schools. This observation is not intended as a critique of the charter school concept, nor of any individual charter school. It is intended only as an empirical reminder to policy makers and charter school advocates and critics that experiments, by their very nature, will produce some frustrations and failures as well as some successes.

Charter schools that are founded to offer a very different educational program fall into the category of both new and novel. This presents Minnesota charter schools with a number of potentially difficult problems: lack of precedent, problems of creating trust within the school, and difficulties in "selling" the charter concept to the broader community before it is fully developed. Current proposals to amend Minnesota's charter school law and administrative policies should be evaluated in terms of the degree to which they consider these problems.

Lack of Precedent: The Cost of Freedom

Charter schools demand that participants learn new roles. Position titles may be superficially similar, but the expectations of what will be done by people in the roles of student, parent, teacher, or administrator may be quite different. Minnesota teachers in newly-novel schools have no "old hands" to whom they can turn with a problem, and no time-tested set of procedures to follow. Not only may roles be poorly defined, but often, due to the pressing nature of starting up, charter school teachers have little time to talk and discuss their work.

An argument that schools must become "learning organizations" has particular application to Minnesota's charter schools: dense communication networks and systematic incorporation of new ideas into practice are necessary to promote and sustain school restructuring. Yet, when we look at the experiences of many Minnesota charter schools to date, we see a paradox:

> *Educational alternatives that meet unique student needs may generate, at the same time, conditions that inhibit collaboration, reflection, and dialogue among adults. Overwriting pressures associated with "newness," and the need to develop the school in a day-to-day, seat of the pants, mode inhibits the creation of a learning organization. Even when teachers are involved in school governance and extra resources are available (which few Minnesota charter schools have had), instructional staff are not afforded the time to talk and reflect on their work.*

A second related problem is that assuming and learning new roles is inherently inefficient, and often fraught with conflict and difficulty. For many Minnesota charter schools the challenges have been particularly apparent in the areas of participatory governance and in the development and implementation of student evaluation and accountability systems -- areas where most schools are seeking to differentiate themselves from more conventional schools.

Innovation Under Daily Pressure

The problems identified above are exacerbated in Minnesota charter schools beyond what is experienced in many other types of start-up organizations because of the custodial functions that schools perform. Students are always there, and must be supervised under conditions that ensure reasonably effective learning and safety. Schedules rarely include significant time for development or reflection in which the whole faculty participates, largely because the pressure of "getting through the week" takes precedence.

The press of the daily schedule is reinforced in some schools by the nature of the student body. Charter schools are "schools of choice," and one might reasonably expect that this would produce a student body that is more highly motivated than in a non-choice school. However, because a number of Minnesota charter schools also advertise themselves as offering an "alternative environment," many students who apply may be viewed by

their teachers or parents as intelligent, but unsuccessful in regular classrooms. In other cases, the schools are explicitly intending to serve students who are not achieving in "regular" settings for a variety of reasons, ranging from disabilities to culturally immersive curricula. Teachers' commitment to working hard and long hours does not assure they can simultaneously manage sometimes difficult student problems, establish innovative programs, engage in new forms of school governance, and develop results-oriented accountability systems. The relatively high proportion of inexperienced teachers who are working in Minnesota charter schools many only serve to compound these issues.

For most of Minnesota's charter schools, less than a year passed between the day the charter was granted and the day the schools doors opened to students. For those schools that were not pre-existing, the planning processes often did not include most of the teachers who have the very real responsibility for making the new schools succeed. The idealistic visions of school design teams have not always translated easily into school practice, and limited support has been available for staff to do the necessary curriculum and program development once the school opened its doors to students. Teachers report feeling as if they were scrambling, with little or no professional development, to design and build an airplane during take-off.

Creating School Culture From Scratch

A third problem for new organizations is to create an effective culture that supports getting the job done. Although in modern societies we are used to dealing with strangers on a daily basis, every new organization may face problems in developing a culture of cooperation. In addition, the lack of previous experience with others in the group often results in simple misunderstandings about who will typically do what, with whom, and when. Developing charter schools should increase the chances for developing trust among staff members and between staff and parents. If both teachers and students select a school rather than being assigned to a school, all stakeholders have more control over the task of finding an environment that reinforces rather than conflicts with personal value systems. Value congruence should, in turn, increase teacher commitment and effort. These results have occurred in a number of Minnesota charter schools that have reached the stage of stabilization. However, in others, a variety of factors associated with newness have interfered with the development of trust. The development of a value-cohesive community focused on children's needs takes time as well as commitment.

New schools are often staffed through the recruitment of an entirely new volunteer group of teachers and administrators. They begin their work with no knowledge of one another, and no history of collaboration. The same is true of the relationships between the school staff and parents: since parents have no previous experience with the school, nor assurance to turn to establish a sense of expectations about how it will work, there is often anxiety and concern in this important set of relationships as well. Communication can be a problem simply because of lack of familiarity. Even when teachers and parents are all committed to the special programs or instructional strategies of the school, they do not share a "shorthand" way of communicating problems, successes and frustrations. This probably

accounts for the fact that, although teachers in Minnesota charter schools rate their relationships with students much more highly than the "typical" school, other aspects of the school's functioning are viewed largely as "average."

Governance and Involvement: What's the Right Balance?

Many Minnesota charter schools aspire to increase the input and effectiveness of their schools by diminishing or eliminating the role of principal and by empowering teachers and parents to perform administrative and leadership functions. To date, this role shift has occurred easily in only a few schools. The parents of charter school students tend to rate their experiences very positively, and to attribute increased personal and academic growth to the school's efforts. They also see themselves as more involved than in their previous schools. Teachers, on the other hand, tend to view parental involvement as being similar to other schools, and to view any administrators as no better than teachers in "regular" schools. Older students, in general, tend to be either neutral or unhappy about their new opportunities to participate in building a school culture, through involvement in decisionmaking and governance, or through other student activities. Thus, although conflict and friction between different groups is apparent in only a few schools, there is little evidence that a common goal translates easily into a cohesive school culture in a short period of time.

Environmental Pressures

A final dilemma for new organizations revolves around the problem of maintaining effective relations with key external constituencies that provide resources. Charter schools face a tough job in establishing a legitimate place within the Minnesota public education system, which itself suffers from environmental pressures to conform to popular views of how "real schools" operate from the larger public and the state. Minnesota charter schools currently face three environmental pressures: (1) the need to be accountable for educational results; (2) the allocation of resources in a difficult fiscal environment; and (3) the effects of public visibility.

- The issue of educational accountability is one that cross the public educational system in Minnesota has yet to fully address. For charter schools, the question becomes: How should a "results-oriented" accountability process look in a new organization? Mandating that schools develop accountability plans as part of their charter contracts does not assure that charter school constituencies (including students, teachers, parents) come to agreement on a set of educational results, implement procedures to measure the progress of the school in achieving these results, or make collective decisions based on the results achieved. In addition, sponsoring school boards face the challenge of establishing defensible criteria for reviewing the performance of charter schools once the initial charter contract has been signed.
- As parents and students in Minnesota exercise their choice for a particular charter school, concentrations of students or color, students with disabilities, and those at risk for school failure are attracting

schools that are not funded at the level of schools in the sponsoring school district. At the same time, costs associated with obtaining, improving, and maintaining adequate facilities further deplete the limited resources of charter schools. Resources in terms of staff time for ongoing program development and funds for professional development are additional needs of these new schools.

- Being designated a "charter school" puts a school "under the microscope." As such, new charter schools may find themselves always trying to look good rather than focusing on creating a school community that can openly reflect on what is working and what is not. The challenge for Minnesota charter schools is being able to engage in open dialogue and reflection when "the charter movement" is under intense public scrutiny.

Implications

Although the data suggest that life in challenging in Minnesota charter schools, we have also observed that some alternatively structured schools have established very effective patterns of human relationships. Although not reported here indepth, we have observed many classrooms in Minnesota charter schools and believe they offer opportunities for exciting education. So, we do not argue that Minnesota charter schools are failing, but only that they are encountering developmental issues that deviate from apparently in the experiences reported in other public and private sectors.[1]

Many Minnesota charter schools are coping with the widely held assumption that planning and implementation are discrete and separable stages in the process of major change. These changes require evolutionary planning, in which action and development are deliberately intertwined over a relatively long period of time. Some clear recommendations can be drawn using evolutionary planning assumptions:

- Charter schools must confront the additional stresses that exist the process of schooling even more potent in new schools. It is not enough to have some release time for teachers to take them out of the classroom. We would go so far as to assert that unless the designers of new schools confront the problem of time very directly, the chances are that they will have the same problems documented here.

- Ideas for charter schools usually focus on student and/or educational philosophies. Minnesota charter schools need to pay more attention to the needs of adults in the school if teachers are to be retained and remain committed. Even in conventionally structured schools, teacher engagement has been shown to be associated with student engagement, which is, in turn, associated

[1] And, as thanks to with the discussion above does not bear on the question of whether children in these schools are receiving an effective and stimulating education. Given the nature of data collection, we are only able to report baseline information on the performance of students enrolled in Minnesota charter schools.

with achievement. New schools may serve to attract stars and misfits, but those that pay attention to teachers' needs may minimize some of the issues that contribute to high levels of turnover and dissatisfaction. Program designers should consider structuring the school to enhance additional "quality of work life" factors that have been shown to be important to teachers' work:

1. Opportunities for collaborative work, particularly as it relates to curriculum development;
2. Opportunities to develop and use new skills, particularly as it relates to offering systematic, developmental training to enhance the new roles that teachers are being asked to fulfill;
3. Feedback on performance, particularly as it relates to the performance of new roles; and
4. Provision of adequate recognition, particularly as it relates to compensation and the need to attract a healthy mix of new and experienced teachers.

- **New charter schools must develop themselves as active learning communities yet constrain their aspirations for curriculum development.** Many charter schools were founded with the idea that new models for curriculum are required. Devoting energy to borrowing and adapting existing curricula during the period of school organization is important. But equally important, as noted above, is to ensure that the period of school planning includes more attention to curriculum than occurs in many cases. Underlying this recommendation is the assumption that the new curriculum should be created, at least in part, by those who will deliver it. At the same time, teachers cannot be expected to efficiently develop curriculum at the same time they provide instruction.

- **New charter schools should plan for the socialization of newbies.** The teachers thrown together during the first year would develop a sense of camaraderie that is profound. But schools typically pay little attention as to how new recruits get to learn the culture and procedures of the school, and assume that once the location of the bathrooms and the lunch routines are pointed out, that informal transmission of norms and procedures will be adequate.

- **Charter schools should actively engage in designing teachers' roles as well as being flexible and experimental in instruction and curriculum content.** Not as there are few operating models for the pedagogy of the future, designs for teacher roles are also both incomplete and poorly formulated. If the new experiments of today are to pay off in alternative paradigms for effective schooling, teachers should engage in active research and reflective dialogue about their own roles as well as those of students and educational processes.

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Appendix A: Charter School Profiles

Blueview Montessori

Location: Wausau
Grade Levels: K – 3 (pre-K available)
Charter Since: 2021
Charter Sponsor: Wausau School Board

Head of Community: Janell Ortiz
Enrollment: 192 (2024-25) · Cap 210
Instructional Hallways: Wausau, 1401

Mission. To empower children to unfold all their potential as whole and unique persons in a world community.

Academic Focus & Curriculum Design. School runs specialized Montessori curriculum. Focusing on literacy and multi-cultural awareness. Students organized in mixed-age classrooms.

Core Teaching Methods. Students are exposed to a prepared environment using Montessori teaching materials and project-based learning.

Non-Traditional Features. Multi-sensorial Montessori program that uses sensorial or art can unlock gaps in overcoming to master school tasks, use of mixed-age grouping of children in classes, emphasis on parents, teachers, and students working together.

Student Profile: as of Spring 2025:

White	81%	Low Income (Determined prior lunch eligibility)	21%
Asian	3%	Special Education	
Black	1%	Limited code gross (ELL)	7%
Hispanic	2%	Individual persons gross a coordinator or student	2%
		Limited English Proficient	3%

Staff Profile: as of Spring 2025:

Student to Instructional Staff Ratio	17:1
Instructional Staff as % of Total Staff	82%
% of Instructional Staff Certified or Licensed Appropriately	100%

Accountability Plan as Agreed to the Charter Contract. In the Montessori setting, students demonstrate their knowledge understanding and skill through: (1) their manipulation of the classroom materials; (2) the design and conduct of their projects and presentations; (3) their ability to explain and discuss the materials contained in the curriculum and individuals they study throughout the years in the various content areas; and (4) the standard setting procedures. Specific progress is in the areas of improvement in literacy and understanding of mathematics. Findings also collected during meetings, engagement, and social emotional evaluation and report and personal observation, results, and skills.

By December 1 each year, the Charter School shall provide the WSD Board of Education an evaluation and report of the curriculum/instructional/curricular data collected as a starting point.

Appendices

[redacted]

Location:	Mississauga	Board of Community:	urban, metro
Grade Levels:	K - 12	Enrolment:	481 (Feb) 1 (Oct 31st)
Opened: Date:	1967	Instruction Continued:	September 1967
Opened: Sponsor:	Mississauga School Board		

Mission: The purpose of [redacted] Community School is to provide students, in community-based educational experience that fosters life-long learning focusing on the value of volunteerism and diverse communities. (Vision)

Academic Focus & Curriculum Design: Each year a broad theme is chosen for the year and teachers and students select projects within this theme (i.e. peace and conflict resolution, environment issues for grade seven students to learn skills, or similar)

Core Teaching Methods: Activity determined by individual teachers, project based learning approach, as appropriate, given the needs of the students.

Most Distinctive Features: Located in the [redacted] Plaza apartment tower complex, multi-race area, wide grade classrooms, school day including breakfast, new book every six weeks, parent visits are encouraged, performance at risk in testing standard (Grade 6 testing), 3 level and ethnic backgrounds, and individuals who live in the neighborhood attend the school if located.

Student Profile: as of Spring 1996:

Black	30%	Low income (free/reduced price lunch eligibility)	30%
White	30%	Special Education	
Arab	15%	identified with severe ABDs	30%
Est. Native	15%	receiving special ed assistance or withdrawn	10%
		Limited English Proficiency	15%

Staff Profile: as of Spring 1996:

Student to Instructional Staff Ratio	21:1
Instructional Staff as % of Total Staff	71%
% of Instructional Staff Certified in Ontario Requirements, Ratio	100%

Accountability Plan as Stated by Sponsoring School Division: The student school must follow the Ontario school curriculum and school system that has been established by the Mississauga public schools. The principal of the school reports to principal at school board that provides administrative and data from the previous school year. The board has established the school's mission to develop the organizational and student policy/values, in collaboration with school board staff and parents and to develop implementation for school management. Teachers also work in small teams to develop a unified philosophy, school rules, and implementation. In addition, the district provides each principal a breakdown of relevant socio-economic/environmental areas in the Mississauga School Board district, and the Grade 6 test of Achievement.

The evaluation and review process for the Mississauga School Board includes a review of program goals and standards, management and administrative procedures, and student performance indicators.

Public Montessori Community School contract

Standards of performance for charter school students will be consistent with the standards of Mississippi public school students. While the Mississippi school for math & science's [illegible] applicable state standards, the charter school will use the state's uniform statewide [illegible] of Mississippi's public school curriculum. It is anticipated the charter school's educational curriculum will:

1. Include [illegible] as specified [illegible];
2. Develop [illegible] e.g., participation in [illegible] student attendance, stability, school-to- [illegible] engagement, perceptions of [illegible] and technology;
3. Specify [illegible];
4. Establish [illegible];
5. [illegible] [illegible] of students;
6. [illegible] [illegible];
7. [illegible] [illegible] [illegible].

Other evaluation requirements include:

1. The charter school must [illegible] and [illegible] related to the assessment for which the school was established and report [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] and reporting;
2. The charter school shall [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]

Appendix A

[redacted] as a veteran

[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
[redacted]	[redacted]		

[redacted] To secure the board of a [redacted] [redacted] [redacted]

[illegible, subtitle]

1. [illegible]
2. [illegible]
3. [illegible]
4. [illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

Commencement of Policy Document

[illegible]

Welcome. This document is a statement of Policy [illegible] as to be complied with internally. Its purpose is to [illegible] and [illegible] in a manner consistent with [illegible] and to [illegible] and [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]

Community of Peace, continued

- Family Involvement
- Contribution and Citizenship
- Physical Health
- Satisfaction

Intertwined within these domains is an overriding domain that is central to our vision and mission: peace building. As stated in our charter school proposal:

> *At Community of Peace Academy, our desired outcome is to educate the whole person -- mind, body, and will -- for peace, justice, freedom, compassion, wholeness, and fullness of life.*

Therefore, we have identified within each domain those indicators that are also indicators of progress toward the outcomes of developing peace building skills among our students and staff. Key outcomes and indicators include:

Outcome	Indicator
Demonstrates age-appropriate behavior	% of students exhibiting skills taught using the PeaceBuilders Curriculum
Is responsible for self	% of students responsible for self as indicated by goals outlined in the PeaceBuilders Curriculum
Is able to work cooperatively in a team	% of students who work cooperatively as indicated by skills taught using PeaceBuilders Curriculum
Students will follow the "Code of Conduct" behavior	% of students complying with the "Code of Conduct"
Actively participates in service projects	% of students engaged in school or community service projects
Demonstrates understanding of right and wrong	% of students who engage in disruptive behavior (e.g., vandalism, stealing, lying, fighting) and require a consequence (students writing a peace essay)
Copes effectively with personal challenges, frustrations, and stressors	% of students who handle frustration appropriately
Has a good self-image	% of students scoring within average range on self-concept measure
Appreciates cultural and individual differences and likenesses	% of students who show appreciation and tolerance
Gets along with other people	% of students who show appreciation and tolerance
Makes healthy lifestyle choices	% of 4-8th grade students reporting involvement in gang activities
	% of students reporting age-appropriate decisionmaking

For school year 1995-1996, the school reported on the outcomes listed above. Data collection has been initiated in the other domain areas and will be available in the future.

DAKOTA/OPEN CHARTER SCHOOL

Location: Morton
Grade Levels: K-12
Charter Date: 1994
Charter Sponsor: State Board of Education

Kind of Community: rural
Enrollment: 50 (FY96) 50 (FY97)
Instruction Initiated: September 1994

Philosophy: The school will reflect the Dakota culture which is a part of the local community and will encourage each student to explore his or her own heritage. The school is founded under the following beliefs: school will be a place that nurtures the inherent potential of each person; each person is unique and will be treated with respect and appreciation; learning is a life long process that is developed and formalized in a school setting; teachers are caught up in a quest to understand and to share that understanding with others; students and teachers are empowered to take control of their lives and to participate in empowering others in the school and community; students and teachers will come away with a respect for self, each other, and have a clear understanding of their role in the community both locally and globally.

Academic Focus & Curriculum Design: Focus on core academic subjects, particularly on math and reading in the lower grades, with the addition of Dakota language and culture classes; focus on addressing the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of youth in order to attend to academic issues.

Core Teaching Methods: Student work is based on an individualized work plan; high school students work in small teams; less structured environment; opportunities for hands-on learning experiences during project times, including use of community-based learning experiences and field trips; team teaching; tutoring program for younger students by older students.

Most Distinctive Features: Multi-grade classes in open setting, small class size; students work in groups; students have jobs and responsibilities related to the running of the school.

Student Profile (as of Spring 1996)

Am. Indian:	96%
White:	4%

Low Income (free/reduced price lunch eligibility):	6%
Special Education -	
(students with active IEPs):	80%
(received services prior to enrollment at charter):	80%
Limited English Proficient:	0%

Staff Profile (as of Spring 1996)

Student to Instructional Staff Ratio:	8:1
Instructional Staff as % of Total Staff:	67%
% of Instructional Staff Certified in Current Responsibility Area:	100%

Accountability Plan as Stated in the Charter Contract: The CHARTER SCHOOL shall set goals and report progress toward meeting goals to the State Board of Education on an annual basis. Standardized testing will be conducted on a fall-fall or spring-spring basis and will show gains equivalent to or greater than gains made in previous years. Pupil attendance will be equal to or greater than in previous years, except in cases of serious illness or other emergency situations.

Dakota/Open Charter School, continued

The CHARTER SCHOOL shall establish a baseline of performance during the 1995-96 school year in relation to the purposes for which the CHARTER SCHOOL was established and report future student performance. The CHARTER SCHOOL will implement a plan to evaluate students after twelfth grade to determine the effectiveness of the CHARTER SCHOOL program in preparing students for transition to other school programs.

At such time that the State Board of Education rules regarding graduation standards become effective, the CHARTER SCHOOL will document that students are demonstrating successful progress at meeting or exceeding the SBE rule.

Baseline data will be collected not later than June 30, 1996 for the 1995-96 school year on the following:

a. Parents and students will be surveyed on the following issues:

   1. Satisfaction with the program;
   2. Opportunities for parent involvement/input;
   3. Quality of the programs offered;
   4. Accommodations made for individual student and family needs;
   5. Opportunities for students to use resources of the community.

b. Teachers will be surveyed to determine:

   1. Programs/curriculum areas that were successful;
   2. Programs/curriculum areas that met with limited success;
   3. Programs/curriculum areas staff plan to modify in coming year.

c. Community members will be surveyed to determine:

   1. Contributions of program to community;
   2. Opportunities for community participation in the programs of the school.

d. Community Service Agencies will be surveyed to determine:

   1. Contributions of the program;
   2. Collaboration efforts with school programs;
   3. Use of agencies by students and/or their parents.

EMILY CHARTER SCHOOL

Location: Emily
Grade Levels: PreK-8
Charter Date: 1994
Charter Sponsor: State Board of Education

Kind of Community: rural
Enrollment: 80 (FY96) 100 (FY97)
Instruction Initiated: September 1994

Mission: The Emily Charter School mission is to provide educational programming that will allow each student to reach his/her full potential; to be self-directed learners, team players, critical and creative thinkers, effective communicators, conscientious and responsible citizens.

Academic Focus & Curriculum Design: Teachers focus on academic skills in the morning (math, reading, language arts, etc.) and more applied skills in the afternoon.

Core Teaching Methods: Multi-age/level classrooms in which students within a class are broken into smaller groups by ability; informal, student-centered; focus on facts and process; also includes three supplementary reading approaches: Accelerated Reading Program, Reading Naturally, and Reading Recovery.

Most Distinctive Features: Small class size; full-day prekindergarten/kindergarten on alternate days; summer program; local community support for school.

Student Profile (as of Spring 1996)

White:	98%	Low Income (free/reduced price lunch eligibility):	75%
Am. Indian:	2%	Special Education -	
		(students with active IEPs):	10%
		(received services prior to enrollment at charter):	8%
		Limited English Proficient:	0%

Staff Profile (as of Spring 1996)

Student to Instructional Staff Ratio:	8:1
Instructional Staff as % of Total Staff:	83%
% of Instructional Staff Certified in Current Responsibility Area*:	54%

* Note: This figure includes educational assistants; every classroom is staffed by a certified teacher.

Accountability Plan as Stated in the Charter Contract: ECS shall set goals and report progress toward meeting goals on an annual basis. Standardized testing will be conducted on a fall-fall or spring-spring basis and will show gains equivalent to or greater than gains made in previous years. Pupil attendance will be equal to or greater than in previous years, except in cases of serious illness or other emergency situations.

ECS shall establish a baseline of performance during the 1994-95 school year in relation to the purposes for which the charter school was established and report future student performance in relation to those goals (e.g., improve pupil learning, increase learning opportunities for pupils, etc.). ECS will implement a plan to evaluate students after eighth grade to determine the effectiveness of the ECS program in preparing students for transition to other school programs.

At such time that the State Board of Education rules regarding graduation standards become effective, ECS will document that students are demonstrating successful progress at meeting or exceeding the SBE rule.

Emily Charter School, continued

Baseline data will be collected during the 1994-95 school year on the following:

a. Parents and students will be surveyed on the following issues:

1. Satisfaction with the program;
2. Opportunities for parent involvement/input;
3. Quality of the programs offered;
4. Accommodations made for individual student and family needs;
5. Opportunities for students to use resources of the community.

b. Teachers will be surveyed to determine:

1. Program/curriculum areas that were successful;
2. Program/curriculum areas that met with limited success;
3. Program/curriculum areas staff plan to modify in coming year.

c. Community members will be surveyed to determine:

1. Contributions of program to community;
2. Opportunities for community participation in the programs of the school.

d. Community Service Agencies will be surveyed to determine:

1. Contributions of the program;
2. Collaboration efforts with school programs;
3. Use of agencies by students and/or their parents.

SBE will review and approve annual goals established by ECS as well as pupil performance from the prior year.

FREDERICK DOUGLASS MATH SCIENCE TECHNOLOGY ACADEMY

Location: Minneapolis
Grade Levels: K-5
Charter Date: 1994
Charter Sponsor: Minneapolis School Board

Kind of Community: urban neighborhood
Enrollment: 56 (FY96) 48 (FY97)
Instruction Initiated: September 1994

Mission: The mission of developing a positive learning environment in which students, parents and community feel empowered is reflected in the school name. Frederick Douglass Academy strives to embody the spirit of determination and clarity of purpose that was reflected in the life of Frederick Douglass, a world-renowned abolitionist, writer, publisher, and orator who was a former slave. Douglass fought all of his life against intellectual and physical bondage and injustices for all humankind.

The school is based on the belief that students enrolled at the Academy must excel in reading, math, science, and technology in order to fully develop their talents and interests to make positive contributions to society. The school believes that in order for a child to excel, he or she needs to know how to manage behaviors as well as interactions with others. This is to occur in a well-structured, disciplined environment that challenges each student to think, grow, and expand his or her horizons. The focus in these areas is reflected in the curriculum, the expertise in faculty and staff, and various school activities.

Frederick Douglass Math-Science Technology Academy incorporates the academic standards of Minneapolis Public Schools and the State of Minnesota along with the school's own standards in order to challenge students to go beyond the norm.

Academic Focus & Curriculum Design: Emphasis on math, science, and technology; curriculum is based on the Curriculum Content Standards developed by the Minneapolis Public Schools and aligned with the Minnesota Graduation Standards. Curriculum is personalized through individualization and integration across subject areas; emphasis on early intervention strategies to address learning difficulties.

Core Teaching Methods: Each teacher determines own pedagogical approach and daily schedule, drawing from developmental and values-oriented approach; use of experiential learnings, 90 minute reading curriculum; empahsis on basic skills, computer curriculum; reliance on parent involvement.

Most Distinctive Features: Smaller class sizes; child-centered multi-age groupings; personalized learning plans; encourage interaction between students, parents, teachers, community; use of neighborhood as learning resource; celebrate differences and emphasis on acceptance and respect.

Student Profile (as of Spring 1996)

Black:	95%	Low Income (free/reduced price lunch eligibility):	82%
Asian:	5%	Special Education -	
		(students with active IEPs):	2%
		(received services prior to enrollment at charter):	9%
		Limited English Proficient:	0%

Staff Profile (as of Spring 1996)

Student to Instructional Staff Ratio:	12:1
Instructional Staff as % of Total Staff:	71%
% of Instructional Staff Certified in Current Responsibility Area:	60%

Fredrick Douglass Math Science Technology Academy, continued

Accountability Plan as Stated by the Sponsoring School District: The charter school must follow the charter school evaluation and review process that has been established by the Minneapolis public schools. The plan calls for the charter school to prepare an annual report that includes information and data from the previous school year. The report will summarize the school's success in meeting the requirements for student achievement, in achieving specific charter school goals and outcomes, and in meeting requirements for fiscal management. Baseline data will be used to help determine changes in student attitudes, behaviors, and achievement. In addition, the charter school must provide an evaluation of selected curricular/instructional areas to the Minneapolis School Board, parents, and the State Board of Education.

The evaluation and review process by the Minneapolis School Board includes a review of program goals and standards, management and administrative procedures, and student performance standards.

Standards of performance for charter school students will be consistent with the standards of Minneapolis public school students. When the Minneapolis schools are able to establish a quantifiable gain standard, the charter school will use the same or greater standard. Major categories of Minneapolis public school indicators to be included in charter school evaluation include:

1. student achievement on specified measures;
2. learning climate (e.g., perceptions of safety; student attendance, stability, turnover; suspensions, disruptions, perceptions of respect and learning);
3. family involvement;
4. community confidence;
5. attraction and retention of students;
6. quality of curriculum;
7. perceptions of instructional effectiveness.

Other evaluation requirements include:

1. The charter school must set goals and objective(s) related to the purpose(s) for which the school was established and report progress toward meeting those goals and objectives.
2. The charter school may use alternative standardized testing, conducted on a spring-spring or fall-fall basis to show gains or losses to previous years.
3. The charter school will establish a baseline for student achievement and report future student achievement in relation to the baseline data.
4. Pupil attendance will be equal to or greater than in previous years, except in cases of serious illness or other emergency situations.
5. The charter school will implement a plan to evaluate students to determine the effectiveness of the charter school program in preparing students for transition to other school programs.
6. At such time that the Minnesota State Board of Education Rule regarding graduation standards become effective, the charter school will document that students are demonstrating successful progress in meeting or exceeding the Minnesota State Board of Education Rule.
7. After the first year of operation, parents and students will be surveyed on the following issues: satisfaction with the program, opportunities for parent involvement or input, quality of the programs offered, accommodations made for individual student and family needs, and opportunities for students to use resources of the community.
8. Teaches will be surveyed to determine program or curriculum areas that were successful, that met with limited success, and those areas that staff plan to modify in the coming year.

METRO DEAF SCHOOL

Location: St. Paul
Grade Levels: K-8
Charter Date: 1993
Charter Sponsor: Forest Lake School Board

Kind of Community: urban center
Enrollment: 33 (FY96) 35 (FY97)
Instruction Initiated: September 1993

Mission: The mission of this outcome-based school is to promote academic excellence in Deaf Education by using and encouraging innovative teaching methods; promote the commitment to Deaf culture and its language, American Sign Language (ASL); utilize ASL as the instructional language; establish programs designed to enhance and promote the student's social, mental, and physical well-being; and give opportunities for teachers and parents to have responsibility for curriculum and programs offered.

Academic Focus & Curriculum Design: Based on a bi-cultural/bi-lingual (Bi-Bi) educational philosophy that is centered on the deaf child's ability and tendency to interact with the world through visual means as opposed to aural means; curriculum includes reading, math, social studies, science, ASL, art, and physical education.

Core Teaching Methods: Use of American Sign Language as the primary language of instruction; English is taught as a second language through reading and writing; all facets of curriculum and instruction are focused on the needs of deaf and hard-of-hearing students.

Most Distinctive Features: One of the few programs in the country that has fully adopted a Bi-Bi educational philosophy; emphasis on teaching deaf history and culture; use of whole language for immersion in a print-rich environment; strong and active parent involvement.

Student Profile (as of Spring 1996)

White:	85%	Low Income (free/reduced price lunch eligibility):	15%
Black:	9%	Special Education -	
Hispanic:	3%	(students with active IEPs):	100%
Asian:	3%	(received services prior to enrollment at charter):	100%
		Limited English Proficient:	100%

Staff Profile (as of Spring 1996)

Student to Instructional Staff Ratio:	5:1
Instructional Staff as % of Total Staff*:	64%
% of Instructional Staff Certified in Current Responsibility Area:	100%

* Note: Does not include educational assistants or interpreters.

Accountability Plan as Stated in the Charter Contract: MDS will have as minimum outcomes for student performance in six areas: deaf studies, language arts, reading, math, science, and social studies. In each area, detailed outcomes are specified by grade.

MDS shall report at least annually to ISD #831 and the State Board of Education with such information about student performance as ISD #831 or the State Board reasonably requests. The nature of these reports and the reporting dates shall be subject to mutual agreement by the Parties.

MINNESOTA NEW COUNTRY SCHOOL

Location: LeSueur
Grade Levels: 7-12
Charter Date: 1994
Charter Sponsor: LeSueur School Board

Kind of Community: small town
Enrollment: 90 (FY96) 91 (FY97)
Instruction Initiated: September 1994

Mission: The mission of MNCS is to provide a rigorous educational program within a flexible setting and structure, a demanding program of experiences with clear and focused outcomes and activities, a strong and active partnership with parents and community, and a decentralized, but accountable management system.

Academic Focus & Curriculum Design: The curriculum is based on Minnesota's Graduation Standards and other competency based ideals such as the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS).

Core Teaching Methods: MNCS uses an interdisciplinary-project based approach, so therefore does not have courses as such. Each student must fulfill all aspects of the curriculum by producing a product to keep in his/her portfolio. Students are encouraged to be self directed and to plan their own approach to fulfilling the curriculum; use of apprenticeships, service learning, youth entrepreneurship, and school-to-work transition. Students expected to use the tools of communication and technology in most projects; since many projects are multi-disciplinary, student could be in many different positions on the curriculum spectrum at a given time.

Most Distinctive Features: School founded on Ted Sizer's essential principles; year round operation with extended hours and flexible scheduling; levels of performance are used instead of a rigid, age-graded arrangement; active learning environments in which teachers serve as advisors to students; emphasis on teacher/student accountability.

Student Profile (as of Spring 1996)

White:	99%	Low Income (free/reduced price lunch eligibility):	8%
Black:	1%	Special Education -	
		(students with active IEPs):	0%
		(received services prior to enrollment at charter):	10%
		Limited English Proficient:	0%

Staff Profile (as of Spring 1996)

Student to Instructional Staff Ratio	15:1
Instructional Staff as % of Total Staff:	86%
% of Instructional Staff Certified in Current Responsibility Area:	83%

Accountability Plan as Stated in the Charter Contract: The sponsoring school district will have the right to review student individual learning plans and portfolios at any time between March 15 and May 15 during the contract years. The following are specific criteria for review of progress:

- Every new student, upon entry as a MNCS student, will complete one standardized achievement test. All first year students will complete two standardized tests.

Minnesota New Country School, continued

- The standardized achievement test shall be selected by mutual agreement between MNCS and the sponsoring school district.
- MNCS shall provide one standardized achievement test result for each student attending school.
- MNCS shall provide a writing sample for each student at the start and end of each year.
- Each student applying for graduation shall complete an exit exhibition demonstrating multiple abilities. Standard to be determined by validation.
- Each student shall complete and maintain an electronic portfolio.
- Each student shall prepare and maintain an individual learning plan and show progress toward the implementation and completion of that plan.

MNCS shall provide ISD #2397 the right to randomly select any ten individual learning plans and portfolios to determine progress toward the competencies.

MNCS shall determine and provide in writing to ISD #2397 before September 1, 1994 a plan describing competency standards and assessment procedures for Level 1 and Level 2 students. In addition, MNCS will provide the following evaluation information:

- Annual survey of student attitudes;
- Annual survey of parent attitudes;
- Annual survey of community attitude.

NEW HEIGHTS, INC.

Location: Stillwater
Grade Levels: K-12
Charter Date: 1993
Charter Sponsor: Stillwater School Board

Kind of Community: suburban
Enrollment: 141 (FY96) 137 (FY97)
Instruction Initiated: September 1993

Mission: The mission of the school is to prepare students to become independent and self-directed learners; team players; active, conscientious, and responsible citizens; effective communicators; quality producers; and critical, creative thinkers.

Academic Focus & Curriculum Design: Multi-graded and integrated program of core academic subjects, including math, reading, science, English, social studies, and other classes; school uses an *entrepreneurial program* for high school students interested in design and building of marketable products and training in business procedures and practices and an *information and sciences technology program.*

Core Teaching Methods: Specific programs within the school that make use of hands-on, high-tech instruction. Use of disciplinary approaches to maintain focus on learning.

Most Distinctive Features: Focus on serving students who may not be achieving their full, academic potential in a traditional classroom setting; small class sizes, full-day kindergarten program, and use of experiential learning.

Student Profile (as of Spring 1996)

White:	99%	Low Income (free/reduced price lunch eligibility):	0%
Black:	1%	Special Education -	
		(students with active IEPs):	20%
		(received services prior to enrollment at charter):	6%
		Limited English Proficient:	0%

Staff Profile (as of Spring 1997)

Student to Instructional Staff Ratio:	13:1
Instructional Staff as % of Total Staff:	65%
% of Instructional Staff Certified in Current Responsibility Area:	100%

Accountability Plan as Stated in the Charter Contract: In this, the initial year of the contact, NHS adopted the recommended state outcome standards. It is understood that during the 1993-1994 school year NHS will seek to develop outcomes for approximate age and grade level groupings, i.e., K-3, 4-6, 7-9, and 10-12.

Upon acceptance, each student will be evaluated for entry-level skills and behavior with emphasis on student strengths. A workable educational plan will be developed in cooperation with the student and parents. The student will be evaluated based on subject mastery with fixed standards of success. Each student will be evaluated by his or her potential in each area of study rather than by a national normal standard for individual subjects based on the student's age and/or grade level. To begin with, fixed standards will be based on nation-wide averages. NHS anticipates developing its own student achievement standards.

New Heights, Inc., continued

Center outcomes related to the Minnesota graduate include:

- Understands and expresses thoughts and feelings in English and another language;
- Understands mathematical processes;
- Applies multiple methods of inquiry in order to plan and conduct research, draw conclusions, and communicate and apply findings;
- Understands relationships among living things and their environments;
- Understands the physical world, earth and space;
- Understands the relationships among the earth's physical features and people across cultures and time;
- Understands the past and continuous development of societies and cultures from diverse and global perspectives;
- Understands the interaction of people and economic, political and governmental systems
- Understands stewardship for the environment;
- Understands the diversity and meaning of artistic expression;
- Understands technological systems and applications;
- Understands the integration of physical, emotional, and spiritual wellness; and
- Understands the effective management of resources in a household, business, community, and government.

Accurate and comprehensive records will be kept on each learner at NHS. It is our objective to evaluate frequently (no more than six weeks between evaluations). At least two times per year the NHS Board of Advisors will make an evaluation of NHS. These reports will be made available to I.S.D. 834 within two weeks of the time of the evaluation. These evaluations are expected to take place in December and May. In addition to this I.S.D. 834 will receive a report from NHS in September of each year detailing student numbers, ages, abilities, and backgrounds.

NEW VISIONS SCHOOL

Location: Minneapolis
Grade Levels: 1-8
Charter Date: 1994
Charter Sponsor: Minneapolis School Board

Kind of Community: urban neighborhood
Enrollment: 138 (FY96) 162 (FY97)
Instruction Initiated: September 1994

Mission: The school is based on the believe that all children are born with innate potential that needs to be nurtured and developed to help children grow. The goal is to help children develop the skills and opportunities they need to be successful in school. Resources will be directed to ensure that students will develop the communication skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening), mathematical and problem-solving skills, study skills and citizenship skills necessary as a foundation for living in a changing society. We will strive to provide an excellent education in an environment that is multi-cultural, gender-fair, and disability aware.

Academic Focus & Curriculum Design: The school focuses on reading. The curriculum includes sensory-motor development; accelerative learning; whole language; reading to succeed; Orten-Gillingham phonics; math, science, social studies, art and music; physical education, and karate.

Core Teaching Methods: Individualized learning plans developed based on each child's learning style; multi-disciplinary approach to instruction. Students participate in special games and other structured activities throughout the day in addition to a physical education program to develop find motor skills, increased visual capabilities and improved brain processing functions.

Most Distinctive Features: Small class sizes. Emphasis on improving reading and eye-hand coordination of students; active learning emphasized through a multi-disciplinary approach to education; special emphasis on reading, math and problem solving skills; motivational reading program that encourages the involvement of family members; other services available in partnership with *A Chance to Grow*: home health care, EEG biofeedback, optometric services, a neurophysiological rehabilitation program, and a resource library for families.

Student Profile (as of Spring 1996)

Black:	54%	Low Income (free/reduced price lunch eligibility):	62%
White:	35%	Special Education -	
Am. Indian:	7%	(students with active IEPs):	47%
Hispanic:	3%	(received services prior to enrollment at charter):	47%
Asian:	1%	Limited English Proficient:	0%

Staff Profile (as of Spring 1996)

Student to Instructional Staff Ratio:	7:1
Instructional Staff as % of Total Staff:	79%
% of Instructional Staff Certified in Current Responsibility Area:	48%

Accountability Plan as Stated by the Sponsoring School District: The charter school must follow the charter school evaluation and review process that has been established by the Minneapolis public schools. The plan calls for the charter school to prepare an annual report that includes information and data from the previous school year.

New Visions School, continued

The report will summarize the school's success in meeting the requirements for student achievement, in achieving specific charter school goals and outcomes, and in meeting requirements for fiscal management. Baseline data will be used to help determine changes in student attitudes, behaviors, and achievement. In addition, the charter school must provide an evaluation of selected curricular/instructional areas to the Minneapolis School Board, parents, and the State Board of Education.

The evaluation and review process by the Minneapolis School Board includes a review of program goals and standards, management and administrative procedures, and student performance standards.

Standards of performance for charter school students will be consistent with the standards of Minneapolis public school students. When the Minneapolis schools are able to establish a quantifiable gain standard, the charter school will use the same or greater standard. Major categories of Minneapolis public school indicators to be included in charter school evaluation include:

1. student achievement on specified measures;
2. learning climate (e.g., perceptions of safety; student attendance, stability, turnover; suspensions, disruptions, perceptions of respect and learning);
3. family involvement;
4. community confidence;
5. attraction and retention of students;
6. quality of curriculum;
7. perceptions of instructional effectiveness.

Other evaluation requirements include:

1. The charter school must set goals and objective(s) related to the purpose(s) for which the school was established and report progress toward meeting those goals and objectives.
2. The charter school may use alternative standardized testing, conducted on a spring-spring or fall-fall basis to show gains or losses to previous years.
3. The charter school will establish a baseline for student achievement and report future student achievement in relation to the baseline data.
4. Pupil attendance will be equal to or greater than in previous years, except in cases of serious illness or other emergency situations.
5. The charter school will implement a plan to evaluate students to determine the effectiveness of the charter school program in preparing students for transition to other school programs.
6. At such time that the Minnesota State Board of Education Rule regarding graduation standards become effective, the charter school will document that students are demonstrating successful progress in meeting or exceeding the Minnesota State Board of Education Rule.
7. After the first year of operation, parents and students will be surveyed on the following issues: satisfaction with the program, opportunities for parent involvement or input, quality of the programs offered, accommodations made for individual student and family needs, and opportunities for students to use resources of the community.
8. Teaches will be surveyed to determine program or curriculum areas that were successful, that met with limited success, and those areas that staff plan to modify in the coming year.

PARENTS ALLIED WITH CHILDREN AND TEACHERS

Location: Anoka
Kind of Community: suburban
Grade Levels: K-9
Enrollment: 176 (FY96) 240 (FY97)
Charter Date: 1994
Instruction Initiated: September 1994
Charter Sponsor: Anoka-Hennepin School Board

Mission/Philosophy: PACT is a responsive, community-based school founded by parents. The school is built on the committed partnership among parents, students, and teachers striving to achieve strong moral character and excellence in educational outcomes. Through attention to each child's needs, and through appropriate use of integrated teaching strategies, the school will foster social and educational development in the students. To become responsible members of their communities, students need to develop proper social skills, respect for self, others, and the world, and the qualities of wisdom and integrity. To reach their full potential, students need to achieve measurable academic competence, become critical, creative thinkers, and effective communicators, with a love of life-long learning.

Academic Focus & Curriculum Design: Mixed grades; focus on core academics - language arts, math, social studies, science, and physical education; use of thematic learning units; some grouping by ability at the secondary level. Anoka-Hennepin school district curriculum objectives are being used to guide curriculum development.

Core Teaching Methods: Teacher-parent teaching partnerships; team teaching; use of active learning; all elementary teachers keep portfolios of student work; each teacher uses his/her own instructional approach.

Most Distinctive Features: School founded as parent-teacher partnership and active parent involvement; small class size; focus on developing strong core academic skills; use of guided learning. Students have classes Monday through Thursday; one Friday a month is field trip day; teachers spend Fridays on planning and administrative tasks.

Student Profile (as of Spring 1996)

White:	95%	Low Income (free/reduced price lunch eligibility):	50%
Am. Indian:	3%	Special Education -	
Hispanic:	2%	(students with active IEPs):	6%
		(received services prior to enrollment at charter):	6%
		Limited English Proficient:	0%

Staff Profile (as of Spring 1996)

Student to Instructional Staff Ratio:	19:1
Instructional Staff as % of Total Staff:	83%
% of Instructional Staff Certified in Current Responsibility Area:	100%

Accountability Plan as Stated in the Charter Contract: Students at the SCHOOL will meet specific outcomes. Those outcomes, by grade level, are specified in an appendix to the charter contract. A copy of this appendix was not available for review.

RIGHT STEP ACADEMY

Location: St. Paul & Minneapolis
Grade Levels: 7-12
Charter Date: 1995
Charter Sponsor: St. Paul School Board

Kind of Community: urban center
Enrollment: 109 (FY96) 230 (FY97)
Instruction Initiated: July 1995

Mission: To provide learners with the necessary tools to make a positive change in attitude. The Academy assists youth in exploring, developing and utilizing their potential. These goals are accomplished through development of a positive self image, solid academic base and mentor role models.

Academic Focus & Curriculum Design: The program is organized around the Minnesota Graduation Standards. A portfolio system is under development in order to track the progress of students. Students take the following subjects: language arts, math, social studies (that includes a mix of geography, economics, American government, U.S. and world history, and African heritage), science, technology (computers), physical education/health, music/art, and personal development. There are four 1 1/2 hour periods per day. Students are exposed to all classes over a two day period. The program design is outcome-oriented and students must demonstrate proficiency in order to obtain their credits.

Core Teaching Methods: Program design is structured, disciplined, and supportive using techniques from the U.S. military; individual and small group instruction.

Most Distinctive Features: Students accepted by referral from the Department of Children and Family Services or the Department of Community Corrections; Afrocentric program with a commitment to hiring African American teachers; small class sizes; development of individual learning plans for each student; teachers initiate phone calls with parents every two weeks; access to Mentor Assistance Program, as needed, to prevent out-of-home placements; students wear uniforms.

Student Profile (as of Spring 1996)

Black:	96%
White:	3%
Hispanic:	1%

Low Income (free/reduced price lunch eligibility):	95%
Special Education -	
(students with active IEPs):	0%
(received services prior to enrollment at charter):	24%
Limited English Proficient:	0%

Staff Profile (as of Spring 1996)

Student to Instructional Staff Ratio:	16:1
Instructional Staff as % of Total Staff:	64%
% of Instructional Staff Certified in Current Responsibility Area:	71%

Accountability Plan as Stated in the Charter Contract and School Handbook: Right Step Academy's specific outcomes will be, at a minimum, in compliance with the State outcome standards. Until the State adopts specific learner outcomes, the outcomes proposed as Rules by the State on January 14, 1992, addressing secondary graduation requirements, shall be the minimum diploma outcomes. Most recent school handbook specifies performance targets and methods of data collection for the following outcome indicators: avoiding the need for out-of-home placement/incarceration; increase in employment skills; improved school attendance; increased self-esteem and ability to compete with and solve personal, emotional and behavioral problems; and completion of specific case plan objectives.

SKILLS FOR TOMORROW

Location: Minneapolis
Grade Levels: 10-12
Charter Date: 1993
Charter Sponsor: Rockford School Board

Kind of Community: urban center
Enrollment: 50 (FY96) 69 (FY97)
Instruction Initiated: March 1994

Vision Statement: The Skills for Tomorrow High School community (students, parents, and staff) will develop and implement a culturally-respectful, outcome-based experiential, school-to-work transition program for high school students. The vision will be achieved through joint ventures and mutual understandings with families, the community, business, and labor by using multi-faceted resources, contemporary physical design, and state-of-the-art technology.

Academic Focus & Curriculum Design: Students educational progress is made by the advancement through three phases: (1) training (all coursework); (2) service learning (supplemented with coursework); and (3) internship (coursework as needed); curriculum aligned with the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS).

Core Teaching Methods: Students develop individualized learning plans; use of technology in instruction; emphasis on real life experiences and applied instruction.

Most Distinctive Features: Candidates for graduation must present a portfolio to his/her committee and defend through an oral examination; use of internships, career shadowing, service learning, and postsecondary enrollment options program.

Student Profile (as of Spring 1996)

Black:	66%	Low Income (free/reduced price lunch eligibility):	34%
White:	18%	Special Education -	
Am. Indian:	12%	(students with active IEPs):	0%
Asian:	4%	(received services prior to enrollment at charter):	22%
		Limited English Proficient:	0%

Staff Profile (as of Spring 1996)

Student to Instructional Staff Ratio:	10:1
Instructional Staff as % of Total Staff:	100%
% of Instructional Staff Certified in Current Responsibility Area:	60%

Accountability Plan as Stated in the Charter Contract: SFTHS will have as minimum outcomes for student performance those set forth by the Minnesota State Board of Education in its graduation requirements. SFTHS shall report at least annually to ISD #883 and the Minnesota Board of Education information about student performance reasonably requested by ISD #883 or the State Board. The nature of these reports and the reporting dates shall be subject to mutual agreement by the parties.

TOIVOLA - MEADOWLANDS

Location: Meadowlands
Grade Levels: K-12
Charter Date: 1992
Charter Sponsor: St. Louis County School Board
Kind of Community: rural
Enrollment: 170 (FY96) 143 (FY97)
Instruction Initiated: September 1993

Mission: To act as a community learning center and provide quality education that is secure, innovative, community-oriented and technologically progressive.

Academic Focus & Curriculum Design: The T-M Charter School emphasizes the use of computers and hands-on learning experiences for students. Two articulated educational goals for all staff are to implement school-wide technology use through a computer network, and to integrate language arts -- including basic skills testing -- across the curriculum.

Core Teaching Methods: Use of personal learning plans and portfolios; instructional methods and materials vary by teacher; use of multi-age classes, interdisciplinary learning,, thematic instruction.

Most Distinctive Features: Parents, teachers, students, and community members worked together to establish the school and develop the curriculum; integration of technology into all areas of the curriculum; small classes; peer mediation and peer helping activities; full range of extra-curricular activities for students.

Student Profile (as of Spring 1996)

White:	95%	Low Income (free/reduced price lunch eligibility):	29%
Am. Indian	4%	Special Education -	
		(students with active IEPs):	10%
		(received services prior to enrollment at charter):	9%
		Limited English Proficient:	0%

Staff Profile (as of Spring 1996)

Student to Instructional Staff Ratio:	10:1
Instructional Staff as % of Total Staff:	61%
% of Instructional Staff Certified in Current Responsibility Area:	89%

Accountability Plan as Stated in the Charter Contract: The T-M Charter School will have as the following minimum outcomes for student performance:

A. A constructive thinker who
   1. makes decisions, solves problems, and thinks critically and creatively;
   2. applies a variety of thought processes to accomplish complex tasks;
   3. evaluates the effectiveness of mental strategies through meaningful reflection; and
   4. demonstrates flexibility, persistence and a sense of ethical considerations.

B. A self directed learner who
   1. sets well-defined and realistic goals and manages the process of achieving them;
   2. acquires, organizes and uses information;
   3. initiates learning activities in the pursuit of individual interests;
   4. applies technology to specific tasks;
   5. applies realistic self-appraisal in selecting the content, method and pace for learning;
   6. integrates knowledge and skills in both familiar and new situations.

Toivola - Meadowlands, continued

C. An effective communicator who
   1. conveys messages through a variety of methods and products;
   2. adapts messages to various audiences and purposes;
   3. engages the intended audience to understand and respond; and
   4. receives and interprets the communication of others.

D. A collaborative producer who
   1. participates as a team member in pursuit of group goals and products;
   2. works well with women and men from diverse backgrounds;
   3. applies conflict-management strategies; and
   4. teaches new skills

E. A community contributor who
   1. appreciates and understands diversity and the interdependence of people in local and global communities;
   2. demonstrates a respect for human differences;
   3. makes informed decisions, and
   4. exercises leadership on behalf of the common good.

F. A person who will be able to
   1. demonstrate the knowledge, skill and ability to develop life long habits that promote the students physical, mental and emotional well being.

Content outcomes are as follows: Language Arts, Mathematical Processes, Technology, Science, Health/Physical Education, Social Studies, World Languages, and Geography.

The procedure for assessing student achievement of outcomes will consist of tests, mastery demonstrations, and assessment by the faculty.

WORLD LEARNER SCHOOL OF CHASKA

Location: Chaska
Age Levels: 6-12
Charter Date: 1995
Charter Sponsor: Chaska School Board

Kind of Community: suburban
Enrollment: 24 (FY96) 44 (FY97)
Instruction Initiated: September 1995

Mission: To empower children to unfold all their potential as whole and unique persons in classrooms, local and world communities. The school's goal is for children to become self-directed learners.

Academic Focus & Curriculum Design: Based on Montessori philosophy of education; use of an integrated curriculum in which each learning area incorporates and relates to another according to "laws and lessons" of life.

Core Teaching Methods: Child-centered learning environment using Montessori methods and materials; use of individual learning plans; multi grade-level classrooms; view of student as "worker" and teacher as "facilitator" to promote self-directed learning; peer tutoring encouraged.

Most Distinctive Features: Adherence to Montessori philosophy; children work at their own pace, according to their own learning need.

Student Profile (as of Spring 1996)

White:	92%	Low Income (free/reduced price lunch eligibility):	4%
Black:	4%	Special Education -	
Asian	4%	(students with active IEPs):	21%
		(received services prior to enrollment at charter):	21%
		Limited English Proficient:	0%

Staff Profile (as of Spring 1996)

Student to Instructional Staff Ratio:	12:1
Instructional Staff as % of Total Staff:	67%
% of Instructional Staff Certified in Current Responsibility Area:	100%

Accountability Plan as Stated in the Charter Contract: Students of the school will meet specific outcomes. Those outcomes, by grade level and subject (reading, writing, grammar, and math) are defined as follows [not included here due to length]: specific learning objectives, a criteria statement for each objective, conditions under which the student will demonstrate performance, the assessment strategy, and a format for recordkeeping by individual student.

The SCHOOL will establish and implement a system which regularly measures and documents student progress. Sponsoring school district and/or its agents will be provided access to full program data upon request. Program audits will be conducted annually by the SCHOOL according to a method developed by the SCHOOL and annually approved by the sponsoring school district.

Appendix B: Evaluation Design and Work Plan

Minnesota Charter School Evaluation Guiding Questions

Characteristics of Charter Schools

1.1 What start-up problems are charter schools encountering?
1.2 What is the relationship of charter schools to their sponsoring districts in terms of support, reporting and accountability?
1.3 How do charter schools describe their mission - is it related to improved student achievement?
1.4 What evaluation and assessment tools do charter schools use to determine their effectiveness?
1.5 What types of support/oversight do sponsoring school boards provide to charter schools?
1.6 What kinds of facilities are charter schools using?

Population Served

1.7 What types of students attend charter schools - where were they before attending the charter school - are they being successful - are charter schools implementing any follow-up studies on former students?
1.8 How well have charter schools worked as a desegregation tool?

Implementation at the School-Level

2.1 Is the results-oriented characteristic of charter schools being successfully implemented?
2.2 Are charter school boards operating effectively?

Roles of Parents, Staff, Students, and the Community

2.4 What role do parents play in charter schools?
2.5 How do charter school teachers view their roles as teachers, administrators, board members etc. - what is the level of teacher satisfaction in charter schools?
2.6 Are teachers in charter schools appropriately licensed - what are some of the problems/issues to be addressed?
2.7 To what degree are students utilized in the governance structure of charter schools?
2.8 To what degree have charter schools utilized partnerships with business, community agencies etc.?

Relationship to Sponsoring District

2.9 What relationships do charter schools have to their sponsoring districts?
2.10 What is the programmatic and fiscal impact of sponsorship on school districts?

State - Local Relationship

2.11 What are perceived strengths and weaknesses of the charter school law?
2.12 How effectively is the contract development/renewal process working?
2.13 How do current funding levels affect charter schools?
2.14 Is the system of sponsorship operating effectively?
2.15 How effective and efficient is the State Board decision making process for approving sponsors proposals?
2.16 How effective and efficient is the State Board decision making process for directly sponsoring charter schools?
2.17 How effective has the Department of Education been in supporting charter schools?

Performance of Charter Schools

3.1 What is the impact of charter schools on student performance?
3.2 What characteristics seem to make charter schools successful?
3.3 What organizational and educational policies and strategies are associated with enhanced student outcomes? What are critical conditions for charter school success? What are the impediments to success?
3.4 Are all charter schools equally successful - if not, are there characteristics of "more" successful schools?
3.5 What are other impacts of charter schools on the school, staff, parents, and community? What affects these impacts?

Charter School Policy

4.1 How does the growth of charter schools in Minnesota compare to other states?
4.2 What have other states done as compared to Minnesota to support the growth of charter schools?
4.3 How does the Minnesota charter school law compare to laws in other states?

Minnesota Charter School Evaluation
Student Performance Assessment
Outcomes and Indicators

Presence and Participation
Indicators:

- Absenteeism rate during 1995-96 school year
- School completion rate (graduation)
- Drop-out rate

Physical Health
Indicators:

- Percent of students reporting engagement in high risk behaviors
- Percent of students using positive coping strategies

Responsibility/Independence
Indicator:

- Percent of students who teachers report can prioritize and set goals and persevere toward them

Contribution and Citizenship
Indicators:

- Percent of students who are suspended or subject to other disciplinary actions during the 1995-96 school year
- Percent of students involved in criminal activity during the 1995-96 school year
- Number and description of school community projects during the 1995-96 school year
- Percent of students involved in each reported community project during the 1995-96 school year

Academic and Functional Literacy
Indicators:

- Comparison of distributions of standardized reading and math test scores to host district (or another appropriate comparison)
- Comparison of distributions of Minnesota basic graduation reading and math test scores to host district (or another appropriate comparison)
- Percent of eligible students passing the Minnesota basic graduation reading and math tests
- Percent of students meeting school's identified outcomes through sschool identified measures

Personal and Social Development
Indicators:

- Information from program descriptions/site visits that describes unique missions of charter schools and approaches to promote personal and social development
- Percent of students satisfied with self
- Percent of students getting along with others

Satisfaction
Indicators:

- Student satisfaction with teachers, fellow students, school work, school activities, student discipline, decisionmaking opportunities, building supplies and upkeep, communication
- Percent of students who re-enroll for 1995-96 school year (depends on goal of school; some charter schools seek to return student to his/her home school after learning goals are met)
- Parent satisfaction with parent involvement, curriculum, student activities, teachers, support services, school building, student discipline, school information services
- Teacher satisfaction with administration, compensation, student responsibility and discipline, curriculum and job tasks, co-workers, parents and communities, building maintenance and supplies, communication
- Host district administrator satisfaction with charter school experience (data collected as part of site visit interview)

Minnesota Charter School Evaluation
Student Performance Assessment
Description of Instruments

The evaluation team used a number of instruments to empirically investigate the impact of charter schools on student performance and the satisfaction of students, parents, and staff with their charter school experience. Whenever possible, the team used existing measures, or parts of measures, to permit the examination of similarities and differences between Minnesota charter schools and other state and national comparison groups.

Student Survey. A written questionnaire consisting of 17 items asking about student demographics, current and past educational experiences, how they use their out of school time, behaviors that put young people at risk (e.g., use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs; violence; criminal activity), peer relations, and how they feel about themselves. Many items were taken directly from the *Minnesota Student Survey* (Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning, 1995) which allowed comparisons to be made with data gathered from Minnesota students in grades 6, 9, and 12. Items taken from the Minnesota Student Survey correspond to outcomes and indicators related to student performance.

Student Satisfaction Survey. A written questionnaire consisting of 46 items asking students to indicate their satisfaction with eight aspects of their school: teachers; fellow students; schoolwork; student activities; student discipline; decision-making opportunities; school buildings, supplies, and upkeep; and communication with others about school events. This survey is part of a battery of instruments, *the Comprehensive Assessment of School Environments* (CASE), that was developed in 1987 by Neal Schmitt and Brian Loher at Michigan State University for the National Association of Secondary School Principals. It was chosen for use in this study because of its theoretical base, technical adequacy, ease in administration, and availability of data from a national sample of schools for comparison purposes. The readability level of the student survey is grades 4-6.

Teacher Satisfaction Survey and Supplement. A written questionnaire consisting of 56 items asking teachers to indicate their satisfaction with nine aspects of their school: administration; compensation; opportunities for advancement; student responsibility and discipline; curriculum and job tasks; co-workers; parents and community; school buildings, supplies, and maintenance; and communication about important school events. This survey is also part of a battery of instruments, *the Comprehensive Assessment of School Environments* (CASE). The readability level of the teacher survey is grades 11-13. A Supplement, consisting of six questions about employment at the charter school, was attached to this survey to gather information specific to this evaluation study.

School Climate Survey. A written questionnaire consisting of 55 items asking teachers their perceptions about the following characteristics of their charter school: teacher-student relationships; security and maintenance; administration; student academic orientation; student behavioral values; guidance and personal counseling services available to students; student-peer relationships; parent and community-school relationships; instructional management; and student activities. This survey is part of a battery of surveys developed at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln by James Keefe, Edgar Kelley, and Stephen Miller in 1985. It was chosen for use in this study to support information gathered as part of the site visits by evaluation team members.

Parent Survey. A written questionnaire consisting of 12 questions related to family background characteristics, reasons for enrolling children, perceived changes in son or daughter's performance since enrollment in the charter school, satisfaction with selected aspects of the charter school

program, and level of involvement/communication whether their son/daughter is receiving special education services. Individual questions were adapted from two sources: the *Comprehensive Assessment of School Environments* (CASE) and surveys developed and used by the Enrollment Options Project at the College of Education and Human Development, University of Minnesota. The readability level of the parent survey is grade 8. Parents for whom English is not their first language had the option of completing a modified parent survey in their native language.

Site Questionnaire. A written questionnaire consisting of 12 questions about various aspects of student and family involvement, discipline, follow-up procedures, special education and curricular outcomes at the charter school that were not asked as part of the other surveys. This questionnaire was completed by each charter school director/facilitator. Items were designed to provide information specific to overall evaluation questions for this study.

Table B.1: Data Collection Strategies and Response Rates

Charter School (enrollment October 1996)	Phone Survey with Director/ Facilitator (Spring 1996)	Site Visits (1996)	Review of Annual Charter Evaluation[a] (1995-96)	Student Satisfaction Survey[b] (Fall 1996)		Student Survey[c] (Fall 1996)		Parent Survey (Fall 1996)		Teacher Surveys and Supplement[d] (Fall 1996)		Site Questionnaire (Fall 1996)
				%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	
• Bluffview Montessori (124)	Yes	5/14,5/15	Yes	N/A	0	N/A	0	53	51	50	10	Yes
• Cedar Riverside Community School (119)	Yes	5/21,5/23,5/30	Yes	58	35	89	34	79	59	28	5	Yes
• City Academy (97)	Yes	5/12,5/22,5/28	No	37	36	29	28	36	13	58	7	Yes
• Community of Peace Academy (216)	Yes	10/22,10/25	Yes	83	19	83	19	28	39	54	11	Yes
• Dakota Open Charter School (50)	Yes	5/29,10/24	No	0	0	38	8	70	14	43	6	Yes
• Emily Charter School (100)	Yes	11/5,11/6	Yes	67	10	75	6	100	65	93	13	Yes
• Frederick Douglass Academy (48)	Yes	4/14,4/15	No	N/A	0	N/A	0	14	3	0	0	Yes
• Metro Deaf School (35)	Yes	11/12,11/14	Yes	N/A	0	N/A	0	67	19	91	10	Yes
• Minnesota New Country School (91)	Yes	4/17,4/18	Yes	88	73	100	50	56	41	100	7	Yes
• New Heights School (137)	Yes	5/8, 5/9	No	67	66	68	45	44	47	61	11	Yes
• New Visions School (162)	Yes	5/16,5/17	No	65	45	0	0	36	48	28	14	Yes
• Parents Allied With Children and Teachers (240)	Yes	10/29,11/6	Yes	83	80	83	72	60	77	50	7	Yes
• Right Step Academy (230)[e] *only one site surveyed n=110	Yes	10/29,10/30	No	19	22	55	21	22	24	44	4	Yes
• Skills For Tomorrow (69)	Yes	6/3,6/4	No	51	35	56	13	45	28	57	4	Yes
• Toivola-Meadowlands (143)	Yes	11/7,11/8	Yes	99	95	77	38	51	52	83	20	Yes
• World Learner School of Chaska (44)	Yes	11/19,11/21	Yes	N/A	0	N/A	0	50	19	100	4	Yes
Totals	100%	100%	56%	60%	507	68%	322	49%	608	54%	133	100%

Note: Three Minnesota charter schools that opened for instruction after 9/1/95 are not included in this evaluation study (Acorn Dual Language, Minnesota Transitions, and Family Learning Center); one additional site that closed at the end of the 1995-96 school year has not been included (Prairie Island Community.

[a] 1995-96 annual program evaluation reports completed and received as of 12/1/96.

[b] Student Satisfaction Survey completed by students in grades 6 and higher; N/A refers to schools serving only grades 5 and lower.

[c] Student Survey completed by students in grades 6, 8, 9, 12; in some schools, students in grades 7, 10, and 11 also completed the survey; N/A refers to schools serving only grades 5 and lower.

[d] Teacher Surveys and Supplement completed by teaching and support staff employed .75 FTE or more.

[e] Only one of the two Right Step Academy school sites was surveyed, for a total possible N of 110 students and 9 staff members.

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